

# **Sensemaking and organising in the policing of high risk situations**

**Focusing the Swedish Police National  
Counter-Terrorist Unit**

**Oscar Rantatalo**



**Department of Education**  
Umeå University 2013

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*Dedicated to Karolina*



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# Abstract

Specialised policing of critical incidents has previously been underexplored within scholarly research. Simultaneously, this type of policing has been recognised as a highly complex endeavour which hinges on an organisational ability to make sense of uncertainty and external contingencies. To build knowledge on the subject of specialised policing, the present thesis aims to explore processes of sensemaking and organising in the work context of specialised police units dedicated to the policing of high risk incidents. Two research questions have guided the thesis project viz.: 1) what ascribed meanings are coupled to specialised police unit work practice and; 2) how can organising of specialised police units be enacted in a reliable manner. These questions are empirically addressed through four part-studies: Study A amounts to a contextual literature study of previous research on specialised police units and aims at conceptual development of a nomenclature describing police specialisation as a professional context. Study B in the thesis examines symbolic meanings connected to specialised police units and how such meanings relate to constructions of occupational identity of police officers working in a specialised police unit. With these studies as a contextual frame, study C within the thesis examines how leadership, management and ICT system within a specialised police unit impacts organisational reliability and sensemaking during incident management. Finally, study D examines organisational reliability on an interpersonal level during incident management as it entails a study of collaboration between police practitioners conducting an intervention. The thesis employs a mainly ideographic and close practice approach to research as the empirical examinations are focused upon one specific specialised police unit, namely the Swedish police's National Counter-Terrorist Unit (NI). Using data collected through interviews, observations and archival sources, the thesis aims to contribute both to organisational development and to knowledge development within the scholarly community. In overview, the results of the thesis indicate that specialised policing on a level of ascribed meaning tend to be represented as exceptional, sensational and surrounded by inferences of elitism, machismo and violence. In extent, such representations inform serving police officers occupational identity work either by spurring identification or dis-identification with prevailing accounts of meaning. On a level of organising, resilient policing of high risk incidents is shown to be dependent on an ability to favour flexibility, both through the organisational frameworks that frames incident management and in interpersonal enactment during task execution. This conclusion challenges day-to-day conceptualisation of specialised police units' work practice as instrumental applications of coercion.





# List of Abbreviations

<b>GSG9</b>	Grenzschutzgruppe 9. The German Federal Police Counter-terrorism Unit
<b>HLP</b>	High/Low Policing
<b>HRO</b>	High-reliability Organisation
<b>NI</b>	The Swedish Police National Counter-terrorist Unit. Also, by Swedish authorities, interchangeably referred to as the National Task Force and the National Counterterrorism Unit [Nationella Insatsstyrkan].
<b>PIA</b>	Working Life Education [Pedagogik i arbetslivet]
<b>PPU</b>	Paramilitary Police Unit
<b>PUFP</b>	Police Use of Force Paradigm
<b>RCMP</b>	Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a federal and national police gendarmerie in Canada
<b>RKP</b>	The Swedish National Criminal Investigation Department. Also, by Swedish authorities, interchangeably referred to as The Swedish Criminal Police and the National Bureau of Investigation [Rikskriminalpolisen]
<b>NPB [RPS]</b>	The Swedish National Police Board [Rikspolisstyrelsen]
<b>SCO19</b>	Specialist Crime and Operations Firearms Command. A Central Operations branch within Greater London's Metropolitan Police Service.
<b>SPG</b>	Special Patrol Group
<b>SPU</b>	Specialised Police Unit
<b>SWAT</b>	Special Weapons and Tactics
<b>SÄPO</b>	Swedish Security Service [Säkerhetspolisen]
<b>TRT</b>	Tactical Response Team

# Original studies

This compilation thesis builds on four part-studies which in the following will be referred to by letter.

## **Study A:**

Rantatalo, O. (2012). The miscellany of militaristic policing: a literature review. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 7 (1), 51–65.

## **Study B:**

Rantatalo, O. (2013). *Macho monsters and nice guys – Media representations and identity work in a specialised police tactical unit*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

## **Study C:**

Rantatalo, O. (2012). Sensemaking in the Swedish National Police Counterterrorist Unit. In C. S. Taylor, D. J. Torpy, & D. K. Das (Eds.), *Policing global movement – Tourism, migration, human trafficking, and terrorism* (pp. 105–23). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

## **Study D:**

Rantatalo, O. (2012). A framework for team-level reliability through a lens of collaboration. *International Journal of Emergency Management*, 8 (3), 264–79.

# Introduction

## A robbery

On a regular Sunday, at 09:28 a.m., two vehicles drive through the northern entrances of a gated business park in the city Umeå in Sweden. Through a surveillance camera, a masked man armed with a 7.64 Kalashnikov automatic rifle and hand grenades is filmed exiting one of the vehicles. The camera captures the individual engaging the bolt of the weapon as he takes the guard post alongside the car he emerged from. A second man exits the other incoming vehicle. The man wears a balaclava and carries a bag containing eight explosive devices. He makes his way towards the staff entry of a building on the premises that houses a cash service depot. Moments later, a large explosion is heard and two more individuals armed with Kalashnikovs exit the vehicles. Simultaneously, as these events take place, a minivan is set on fire in the Umeå Police Department's driveway. The burning minivan blocks the entryway for first-responder vehicles in what at the time is believed to be an evasive manoeuvre connected to the on-going robbery (Stockholm District Court, 2010).

## A hostage situation

An alarm call is received at SOS Central in the city of Karlskrona. The call is registered at 08:41 a.m. and the caller identifies himself as part of the staff from the psychiatric ward at the local Blekinge hospital. The caller reports that a man has entrenched himself in a treatment room with his hospitalised son as a hostage. The individual has been seen by personnel in the ward as he displayed bottles containing a yellowish, petroleum-like substance and a lighter. As the caller fears that the hostage-taker risks harming himself and his son, SOS Central is alerted. In response to the incident, several units of police, fire fighters, and ambulances are called to the premises and a large part of the hospital is evacuated due to risks of fire and explosions. After first responders' arrival, the man is seen by police observers at one of the windows of the ward, again displaying bottles and a lighter. Police aided by interpreters establish first contact with the individual, who declares that his family had been denied asylum on a pending migration board application and that they had been given notice they were to be deported the following Monday. In what may be called an act of desperation, the man opposes the decision with an explicit threat to set himself and his son on fire, unless the migration board reconsiders its decision (Klintö & Ljungdahl, 2005; Olsson, 2005; Rothenborg, 2005).

## **A visible yet 'blackboxed' area of policing**

The vignettes above describe situations in which specialised police units (henceforth SPUs) were designated to manage and resolve critical incidents of differing natures. As members of the general societal public, we are well acquainted with storylines like these, which represent the conditions for police work as reactive, dramatic, dangerous, and oriented towards action (cf. Manning, 2003). Indeed, SPUs such as Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams, special response units, and counter-terrorist units arguably stand as symbols epitomising many ingredients in contemporary notions of 'elite', 'thin blue line' policing conducted in order to keep society from disarray (Kraska, 2007; see also Reiner, 2010). With such connotations, SPUs are considered a visible type of policing that often figures in debates and discussions regarding police interventions, police legitimacy, and police use of force (Hills, 1995). Given the fact that great attention is paid to this type of police work in public discourse, surprisingly little is known about SPU work practices from a scholarly point of view. In the research literature, empirical studies targeting SPUs have been argued to have been 'completely overlooked', leading to a prevailing 'gap in our understanding of the police' (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011; Kraska & Paulsen, 1997, p. 254–255; Lum, Haberfeld, Fachner, & Lieberman, 2011). In this sense, the attribution that the police are 'one of society's best known, but least understood institutions' (Bittner, 1974, p. 17), is highly applicable in the context of specialised policing.

The lack of knowledge regarding SPUs is unfortunate, as the police have a large formal responsibility to deal with a variety of critical and intricate situations, and SPUs are in this respect a material part of contemporary society's most coercive response to deviance. In the robbery described above, this role was evidenced in the confrontation between robbers and police that followed that brief vignette. Upon contact with the police, the robbers actively engaged fire, shooting approximately 35 rounds of ammunition that ultimately resulted in the killing of a police dog. The police response action trajectory was, in this case, to meet violence with violence, as police fired approximately 80 rounds of ammunition, injuring two of the robbers and immobilising the culprits' escape vehicles (National Bureau of Investigations, 2010).

In contrast to such high levels of force, the second example depicts a man holding his son captive in a maladaptive response to a governmental decision that he believed was wrongful. The hostage was held for expressive rather than instrumental reasons, and the hostage-taker can, based on the characteristics of the situation, be believed to have been in a highly

emotional state. This situation was approached by the police through a 'negotiated resolution' approach (cf. Vecchi, Van Hasselt, & Romano, 2005) that aimed to facilitate transition from an incident characterised by high levels of emotion towards a calm situation focussed on problem solving. This approach would have been decided based on an evaluation of the situation in terms of time frames and accompanying possibilities for non-violent tactics and negotiation. In the end, this situation stretched over two days, but was resolved without violence.

As introductory examples in the present thesis, these vignettes reveal several challenges connected to the policing of critical incidents. For instance, both vignettes share the features of being reactive, extraordinary, and highly consequential with actual risks to life at stake. In addition to these similarities, the introductory examples are – by their contextual differences – also indicative of the variance contained in the policing of critical incidents. Such variance challenges our day-to-day understandings of SPU work practice as exclusively aimed at 'default' orchestration of brute force. Rather, such vignettes, as well as previous research, indicates that flexibility and management of uncertainty are defining aspects of SPU work practice (cf. Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011; Okhuysen, 2009). Specialised police units' operational interventions have, in this line of thought, been discussed as highly dependent on an organisational ability to detect, contain, and respond to rapidly changing conditions in an on-going, emergent manner as the police in these situations have to make sense of and assess a primary dynamic process (an on-going incident) and, whilst so doing, establish a secondary process (a response) that is typically dependent on simultaneity and swiftness in task execution (cf. Blake, Sheldon, Strzelecki, & Williams, 2012; Clark, Jackson, Schaefer, & Sharpe, 2000; Williams & Westall, 2003).

Drawing on and adding to these insights regarding SPU work practice, the present thesis takes its departure in the question of how organising for confrontational police interventions can be accomplished given that this professional context is encompassed with complexities, uncertainties, and high demands. As mentioned, questions such as these are presently largely underexplored, as previous studies of SPU organisations are first and foremost rare. Secondly, the few extant studies have mainly addressed police specialisation on aggregated and policy levels, focusing the role of SPUs in societal crisis preparedness and internal security (Deflem, 2010; Rantatalo, 2012a). Although such perspectives shed light on SPUs' roles and purposes within wider frames of policing systems, they say little about the social processes that bring forth organisational capacities to intervene when situations like the above-exemplified occurs. Knowledge about issues such as these is presently largely experiential in nature, residing within the

immediate context of the occupational community of police officers working with confrontational police interventions.

With this backdrop, the present thesis adds to the existing knowledge about SPU work practice through an explorative approach aimed to 'unbox' the processes that enable or constrain practitioners' abilities to act collectively and goal oriented in the social and material context of their work. This dimension of SPU work practice is in the following explored with the concept of organisational 'sensemaking' as a guiding theoretical frame (cf. Weick, 1979, 1995). As will be put forth in the theoretical section of the thesis, a sensemaking perspective entails a processual view of the social world and, in this sense, conceptualises organisations as the 'products' of organising rather than the other way around (Colville, Hennestad, & Thoner, 2013). As such, a sensemaking perspective applied in SPU work practice offers possibilities for close, practical, research focussed upon how social processes of organising are constructed and manifested on an interpersonal level of organising. From this brief background, the aim and research questions of the present thesis can be clarified.

## **Aim and objectives**

The overall purpose of the thesis is to explore and analyse processes of sensemaking and organising in the empirical context of specialised policing dedicated to confrontational police interventions. Two research questions have guided the examination:

### ***Research question 1: What ascribed meanings are coupled to specialised police unit work practice?***

This may seem as a malpositioned question in the context of organising, as it is geared towards an enquiry into the attributions of meanings and present understandings that surround the empirical context of SPUs, rather than into the processes of organising within this empirical context. In this respect, the first question of the thesis is less geared towards a 'how' question of organis-*ing* and more towards a 'what' question of organis-*ation*. That is, the first question targets ascribed meanings connected to specialised policing in order to understand this as a contemporary societal phenomenon. In my research, the need to pose this question stemmed from a notion that this type of policing is a largely unexplored phenomenon. As such, the area of study was and is in need of concepts – and quite literally vocabularies – which can serve to contextualise social processes of organising within the targeted setting. Following a sensemaking paradigm, vocabularies of organising are important if one sets out to understand enactment and

organising *in situ*, as the previous frames the latter. This way of reasoning echoes MacIntyre's (1984, p. 216) declaration that 'I can only answer the question "what am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part"'. As such, it could be stated that, in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of organising undertaken by specialised police units, a prior understanding of what stories, narratives, symbols, and bodies of knowledge this type of organising is part of is a necessity. It is from this perspective that Research question 1 is posed in the present research project.

***Research question 2: How can SPU organising be enacted in a reliable manner?***

The second question targets the situated, emergent, and on-going properties of organising in SPU work practice, as it calls for examination of how police officers within a specialised unit can reliably make sense of and organise for the dynamic unfolding of events in incident management contexts. This trajectory of enquiry is, throughout the thesis, pursued through ideographical and understanding-oriented studies of a specific, specialised police unit, namely the Swedish police's National Counter-Terrorist Unit (henceforth NI). An initial and enduring purpose in targeting NI has been to gear the design of the research to allow both for support of situated practice, as well as to make contributions to scholarly knowledge regarding how social interactions and the immediate structure of intervention organisations can vouch for resilience and, thus, successful management of high-risk situations. As such, Research question 2 aims to pursue understandings and interpretations of SPU behaviour, which are sought to inform praxis.

The above-stated questions have developed inductively during the process of the present research project. The material result of this project is a thesis that contains four empirical studies. The two questions posted above are closely related to the empirical studies; they are, however, not to be considered as separate and literal aims of these studies. Rather, the questions as they are formulated here describe the contributions of the studies taken together.

**Research setting**

The research undertaking in the thesis has been conducted in two main settings: The first two years of research were conducted within the frames of the EU funded interregional research project 'Nordic Safety and Security' (NSS). After these years, the Department of Education at Umeå University counter-funded the thesis project with corresponding research time. The



specific conditions coupled to the different phases of research are developed in detail below.

### ***The project phase – Nordic safety and security (NSS)***

The NSS project was an EU-funded regional development research project mainly consisting of participants from Umeå University, Luleå University, Västerbotten County Council, and the Swedish Defence Research Agency. The NSS housed six research programmes, of which the research reported in this thesis belonged to a programme called 'Leadership – colleagues – technology'. The empirical focus of the NSS project was to study 'blue-light' response organisations, such as police, fire service, and emergency medical assistance, from different social scientific, behavioural, and technological perspectives. An explicit aim with the NSS project's research programmes was to produce applicable knowledge regarding the particularities of organising for critical incidents in order to enhance competence, develop methodologies, and assist in future training for practitioners within the targeted settings (cf. Backteman-Erlanson, 2013). Based on this research setting, the studies undertaken in the present thesis have been oriented towards the study of police incident management, with one specific aim being the provision of knowledge about this praxis that enables support of reliable organising in police interventions. To target this aspect of organising, a close collaboration with end users in planning and conducting the separate studies was necessary. This approach to empirical research has similarities with what can be called developmentally oriented organisational research (Svensson, Brulin, Ellström, & Widgegren, 2002) or praxis-oriented research (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Sandberg, 1982), in which empirical examination serves the dual goals of contributing to organisational development (i.e. relevancy) and scientific knowledge development (i.e. scientificity).

With these preconditions in mind, studies in the NSS phase of research were conducted with an idiographic approach, targeting the NI as a specific example of an SPU organisation. The NI can, in general terms, be described as a specialised Swedish police unit which, in accordance with its mission statement, purpose, and placement within the Swedish system of policing, has as its main tasks to operationally counter acts of terrorism and serve as a support resource in complex police interventions (National Police Board, 2004). As such, it provides a rich empirical context for studies of sensemaking and hands-on organising in a context of confrontational police interventions. The studies of the NI were oriented to examine the reliable organising through analysis of 1) employees' sensemaking of their

intervention organisation and 2) interactions and collaboration during incident management work practice.

As indicated in Research Question 2, posted above, the research approach within this phase of enquiry aimed to provide understandings of organising and sensemaking in SPU practice. This geared the studies within the NSS project towards interpretative (*verstehen*) research designs in which a subjective approach to social phenomena is central (cf. Burrell & Morgan, 1979) and in which the focus of the empirical studies has been to provide qualitative accounts of police interventions as they are meaningfully experienced, understood, and bracketed by participants in action (see Van Maanen, 1983; Schütz, 1967). As Denzin & Lincoln (2005) hypothesised, such an approach serves to make aspects of the social world visible through the application of a variety of interpretative practices (i.e. analytical frameworks, assessments) and available methodological tools (observations, interviews) for the study of the social world. Thus, the approach can, in condensed form, be described as explicating the meanings that individuals bring to complex phenomena, whilst remaining aimed at constructing representations of such phenomena that enable understanding of the subject matter at hand.

### ***Post-project phase***

In the second phase of the thesis project, the question of how to understand specialised policing was directed towards exploration of the culturally saturated meanings that surround specialised police units. The concept of *ascribed* meaning was used to target this aspect of SPU organisations. As mentioned in Research Question 1, police interventions in this phase of research were less conceptualised as organisational work practice than they were viewed as a contemporary social phenomenon in need of an analytically viable vocabulary. The research objectives guiding enquiry in the post-project phase were inductively generated through the research process, as it became apparent that a strong symbolism was attached to confrontational police work and that these types of organisations had previously been under-researched. These observations were during the NSS project phase treated as issues for future research which, after project completion, could be pursued in order to create a better overall understanding about the particularities that surround SPU organising. In this way, the studies conducted in the post-project phase were carried out with the aim to complement and enrich the studies within the NSS project and vice versa.

## ***Progression and explanatory power***

The combination of different types of enquiry in the present thesis is motivated by an attempt to achieve conjoint explanatory power of the studies in whole. In this sense, it can be put forth that the combination of approaches favouring, on the one hand, the emergent properties of situated organising and, on the other, the ascribed meaning connected to SPUs, in large renders what has been referred to as *bricolage* (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe, 2001) knowledge building. That is, different analytical routes and perspectives serve to bring multifarious representations of the social world to the fore and, taken collectively, these complementary representations may serve to enrich the present understanding of a phenomenon. In whole, the thesis represents an exploration into the subject of organising and sensemaking in the context of confrontational police interventions. The different studies and research questions are thus motivated by their contributions to this overarching aim.

## **Thesis outline**

Following the introduction, the thesis contains five main chapters: In chapter 2, the research fields of policing and specialised policing are reviewed with the aim to empirically contextualise the thesis. The chapter starts with a review of previous research in an examination of the defining aspects of police work, police specialisation, and SPUs. Drawing on the review of research, a conceptual model is developed that differentiates 1) police specialisation relative to routine policing and 2) different forms of police specialisation. Whilst previous conceptualisations of SPUs to a great extent have focussed on use of force as a defining aspect police specialisation, the presented model complements this with a high/low policing demarcation. Chapter 2 ends with an application of such a conceptualization within a Swedish policing context. By this, the role of the NI relative to Swedish routine policing and other types of Swedish specialised police units is made clear.

Following the section on police and policing, chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework with which sensemaking and organising has been explored in the present thesis. Chapter 3 begins with a brief review of previous educational research, which has focussed on 'organisation' both in terms of context and process. After locating the thesis within this field of research, the ontological framework that has underpinned the empirical examinations of the thesis is presented. Drawing on processual ontology, the concepts of sensemaking and organising are developed theoretically and the notion of reliable organising is explained from a sensemaking perspective.

The chapter ends with a description of how the empirical studies of the thesis relate to the presented theoretical framework. With this disposition, the ambition in chapter 3 is to explicate the theoretical foundation of the thesis on different levels of abstraction, ranging from ontology and epistemology, to a concept level and, lastly, how the theoretical foundation has informed the empirical studies of the thesis.

Following the theory, chapter 4 considers methodology and empirical methods for the undertaken research. In total, the section contains an overview of the empirical research approach, selected empirical material, methods of data collection, and analytical strategies that have been utilised in the thesis. The section starts with a brief methodological discussion regarding the conduction of an applied ideographical and praxis oriented research project. Following this, the methods that have been used in the thesis project are presented in overview. The methods section ends with an explanation of how data have been analysed as well as reflections on research ethics.

After the methodology, chapter 5 provides short summaries of the part-studies included in the thesis. Each summary provides the reader with condensed aims, methods, and major findings of the undertaken empirical studies. The overarching purpose of chapter 5 is twofold, as this section gives the reader insights regarding the designs of the part-studies along with an understanding of SPU organising for high-risk situations. Concerning the latter ambition, the order of presentation in chapter 5 deviates from the chronological order in which the part-studies were conducted.

Finally, chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a discussion structured in accordance with the aims and research questions provided in the introduction of the thesis. In this concluding chapter, the part-studies of the thesis are revisited and their contributions to the thesis aim and the state of knowledge regarding SPU work practice are made explicit. The chapter also encircles some research limitations in the present thesis project and based on this discussion, reflections regarding prospects for further research are offered.



# **Policing and the police**

The following chapter contextualises specialised police units and the policing conducted by such units within a wider frame of police research. The chapter seeks the development of a working definition and a connected nomenclature describing such specialised police units. The chapter begins with an examination of the concepts of policing and police before narrowing in on the subject of specialised policing. A review of previous research on this subject is offered wherein prevailing classifications of these types of police organisations are categorised. Based on the review, problems with present definitions of specialised policing are highlighted and a re-conceptualisation is suggested. Using the re-conceptualisation, the chapter ends with an analysis of Swedish SPU resources in which seemingly similar but functionally diverse Swedish SPUs are differentiated.

## **Conceptual separation of policing and police**

Our daily commonsensical notions of the concepts of policing and police tend to treat these concepts coincidentally. Policing is, from such perspectives, simply the actions carried out by police services around the world (Jones, 2002). In a historical perspective, this model of policing has been related to modern projects of police professionalisation, which in the Western world tied the practices of policing to a particular public institution – the police (Larsson & Gundhus, 2007). The coincidental perspective on police and policing has been put forth as a simplified and conflated characterisation of contemporary policing in multifaceted and diverse societal contexts (Johnston, 1999; Shearing, 2007; Shearing & Stenning, 1987). As a result, the bulk of current police research commonly demarcates police from policing through definitions wherein the police can be described as a specific institution and policing as a set of activities and practices connected to societal social regulation (Rowe, 2008; Wakefield, 2003).

From this point of view, policing can, at a baseline, be defined to entail activities and practices that are carried out in order to purposively regulate conduct within a defined social order. Hence, policing can be understood as processes of governance and social control (Innes, 2003; Reiner, 2010). Such a definition of policing is, as highlighted by Emsley (1996) and Furuhaugen (2009), close to the etymological roots of the words police and policing – 'polis' and 'politeia' – which denotes the archetypical ancient Greek state and its forms of governance. The emphasis on policing as a mean to achieve social order implies that a wide range of activities and societal functions in different aspects qualify as performing policing (cf. Shearing and Stenning,

1987). Reiner (2010), with reference to Norris and Armstrong (1999), Sheptycki (2000), and Davis (1990), lists the army, bus conductors, close-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, architecture, and street furniture as contemporary examples of functions within society that enact policing in the widest sense of the term.

Given that policing does not presuppose the existence of police, the idea of coupling policing activities to police institutions has been concluded to develop in parallel with advancement of increasingly complex nation-states (Waddington, 1999a). Viewed as an identifiable institution, the police thus came into existence through a development in which the monopolisation and professionalisation of policing emerged in order to ensure state governance and enforcement of specific versions of social order (Bobbitt, 2002; Innes, 2003; Manning, 2003). In parallel to such developments, state-owned, hierarchical, bureaucratic institutions – the police as we know it – proliferated.

## **The police institution**

Drawing on an understanding of the police as an institution with specific historical roots and purposes, a standard way to define the features of the police is by reference to the mandate given this institution in relation to the state. As noted, the concept of police is tightly coupled to state sanctioned and, hence, legal and legitimate enforcement of social order. Such enforcement is thus based on a monopoly of violence. In this line of thought, archetypical textbook definitions of the police often highlight the right to use violence as the paramount characteristic of the police. A prominent definition of the police is provided in the works of Bittner (1970, 1974, 1990, p. 131), who established the police to be a 'mechanism for the distribution of non-negotiable coercive force'. Bittner added to the definition that police use of force in practice often has the status of being potential rather than actual, and that it is to be minimised in its use in order to be legitimate. The acknowledgement that police use of force is legitimate means that police coercion at a baseline is sanctioned by, and derives from, the same public that is subjected to it (Waddington, 1999a). This relationship between government, governed, and police has been put forth as problematic, putting the police in the contradictory position of having (and being expected to use) powers of coercion, which have the capacity to threaten safety and security in order to ensure safety and security (Kleinig, 1996). Bittner's definition, which has subsequently been referred to as a 'police use of force paradigm' (PUFP; see Brodeur, 2010), has since its formulation gained somewhat of an canonised status within the police research community. As such, succeeding conceptualisations tend to echo Bittner's focus on coercion as axiomatic to

the concept of police. Klockars (1985, p. 12), for instance, builds on the definition when stating that the police are 'institutions or individuals given the general right to use coercive force by the state within the state's domestic territory'. In this definition, an emphasis lies on domesticity, highlighting that it is society's internal boundaries that are within the policing mandate. Likewise, Reiner (2010, p. 8) also defines the 'distinctiveness' of the police with reference to use of force and domesticity when stating that the police are 'the specialist repositories for the state's monopolisation of legitimate force within its territory'. Bayley (1985) also draws upon and adds to the PUFPP definition when stating that police amounts to 'people authorized by a group to regulate interpersonal relations within the group through the application of physical force, internal usage, and collective authorization' (p. 7).

Some extended reflections can be put forth in relation to the PUFPP-derived definitions of the police. The specific focus on use of force does not imply that direct force is the only means by which police work is carried out. Rather, as stated by Bittner (and since supported by considerable research on police practice), the capacity to use force is called for rather infrequently in operative police practice. This can be attributed to the observations that, with a separation of police and policing, a lot of police work – that is activities carried out by police institutions – does not automatically amount to policing. Contrary to common beliefs and normatively derived definitions of the police, research on the practice of uniformed, mundane, 'cop on the beat' police work indicates that the main tenets of this professional practice entail neither enforcement of laws nor crime prevention. Rather, law enforcement has been argued to play a small role in practical police work, as the police rarely invoke the law in contacts with the public (Crawshaw, Cullen, & Williamson, 2007; Manning, 2003; Reiner, 2012). Further, when the law is invoked, the challenge for police officers largely amounts to translation of written legislation into law in action (McLaughlin, 2001). This makes discretion and even under enforcement of the law ingredients of police work (such as in the policing of protests, where the police may be tolerant of minor law-breaking in order to avoid confrontation; cf. Della Porta and Fillieule, 2004). These observations bring about the question of what the central constituents of everyday policing entails. This question has been richly studied and a number of suggestions are available in the literature. Hoogenboom (2012), for instance, encircles a central tenet of policing through the concept of order maintenance. By reference to Ericson (1982) and Bittner (1974), Hoogenboom contends that order maintenance regards frontline reproduction of social order, which is manifested in a variety of ways as the situations police encounter vary extensively in practice. The wide array of situations police face can be argued to characterise the



police profession as partly a specialty (i.e. legitimate exercise of coercion and physical force), but also as highly dependent on generalist knowledge (Birkeland, 2007) and social skills (Finstad, 2000). The uniformed public police officer has, within this understanding been described through allegories such as a peace keeper (Banton, 1974; Holgersson, 2005), a problem solver (Agevall & Jenner, 2006), and as street-level politicians or street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010; Muir, 1979). Police professional knowledge has in turn been described in terms of craftsmanship, a set of understandings, outlooks on the world, and as an eye for the job (Finstad, 2000; Skolnick, 1994); which, on a practical level, does not emanate from systematised methodologies, bodies of knowledge, or monopolised task areas, but rather from experience and experiential knowledge (Neyroud & Beckley, 2001).

Drawing on the notion that force is exercised rather infrequently and that police engage in a wide variety of situations, everyday police work has been described as carried out based on a probability of force rather than on direct manifestations of it. Hence, when the police engage in activities, including activities other than policing, there is always a probability of what in Bayley's (1994 pp. 34-35) terms can be called 'authoritative intervention'. This means that the police have a general authority to apply legitimate force within the boundaries of what the police mandate deems necessary. Thus, not all police work includes direct use of force, but all policing by police is characterised by a 'capacity to overpower resistance to their intervention in any situation' (Brodeur, 2010, p. 113). This differentiates contemporary police institutions' policing from other societal policing functions in the sense that the latter exercises force and authority within limited scopes of society, such as prison guards apprehending inmates or surgeons operating on individuals (cf. Fyfe, 1991), whilst the former is unlimited so long as the mandate is applicable.

Lastly, the separation of police and policing also means that the police must refrain from policing in a variety of situations wherein the policing mandate is not applicable. For instance, there are situations in which order is breached outside the internal boundaries of a country or a community that is being policed by state or local police (Bayley, 1994; Waddington, 1999a). As implied above, the unique feature of the police lies in the mandate to use legitimate force and that consequential from such mandate a range of tasks and approaches to task fulfilment can be denoted as police-specific. In the following sections, focus will be directed at policing conducted by specialised police units.

## Specialised police units

To understand the practices and main task areas of specialised police units, the question of what the concept specialisation amounts to is a central starting point for discussion. As stated by Bayley (1985, p. 38), specialisation is a relative term that is

*...referring to exclusiveness in performing a task. In policing, the defining task is the application of physical force within a community. A specialized police devote all their attention to the application of physical constraint; a non-specialized police do many other things besides.*

Bayley's definition of specialised police draws on a PUFPP definition of what the defining characteristic of the police in a community amounts to. From such a perspective, police specialisation implies the exclusion of other use of force specialists' (mainly military institutions') involvement in the domestic maintenance of social order. Specialised police units can, with this basic definition of specialisation as a basis, be described as police sub-organisations which are within larger systems of policing and are, in varying respects, dedicated to concerted applications of force.

Originally, the development and propagation of specialised police units took place during periods of political turmoil, protests, events of public disorder, and political terrorism in Western countries stretching from the late 1960s to the early 1980s (Kraska & Paulsen, 1997; Mijares & McCarthy, 2008; Waddington, 1999a). In the U.S. context, the idea of SWAT (special weapons and tactics) teams was first introduced in Los Angeles in 1968, as a measure to counter a preceding series of events such as the 'long hot summer' race riots and civil unrest following the Vietnam War protests (Mijares & McCarthy, 2008; Waddington, 1999a, 1999b). Following such highly publicised incidents, SWAT teams were instated mainly in metropolitan police departments and, over time, these types of SPUs became normalised, spreading to smaller communities (Kraska, 1999). It is noteworthy that the term SWAT, since the first instatements of SPUs in the U.S. context, has come to be a somewhat generic term for police tactical units, although extensive variations exist in naming. Examples from the literature include terms such as special response teams, tactical response teams, tactical action groups, emergency response teams, emergency service units, special operations teams, tactical apprehension and control teams, selective enforcement units, and problem area tactical teams (cf. Clark et al., 2000; Rojek & Klinger, 2004).

Apart from the development of tactical policing in the U.S., a similar development took place in the U.K. during the 1970s and 1980s with the metropolitan experiences of rioting (e.g. the Brixton riots) and continuing political discussion regarding 'urban threats'. These developments led to the establishment and proliferation of police support units known as Special Patrol Groups (SPGs), which specialised in crowd control and riot policing (Bowling & Foster, 2002; Hills, 1995; Hopkins-Burke, 2004). The American development of SWAT teams and the British establishment of riot control squads are representative of the empirical contexts in which specialised police have been discussed in scholarly literature. In this way, specialised police units have mainly been related either to issues of public order and riot control or to questions regarding 'tactical policing' of other types of high-risk violent situations.

In addition to being discussed in these above-mentioned contexts, three typical ways to approach or conceptualise the subject of specialised police units can be identified in the research literature. Two of these approaches explicitly discuss police specialisation as a contemporary societal phenomenon and, when doing so, either tends to conceptualise specialisation as a trend of hard and 'strong arm' policing (Bowling & Foster, 2002; Hopkins-Burke, 2004) or as military styled policing (Jefferson, 1993). Whilst these two images of specialisation in different ways touches on the subject of police in society, the third approach to research on SPUs tends not to discuss police specialisation as a phenomenon per se, but rather regards the context of SPUs as empirical or organisational settings in which other types of phenomenon are examined. In the following, selected research from all three perspectives is surveyed in overview.

### ***Specialised police units as empirical context***

As noted in the introductory chapter of the thesis, empirical research conducted within the frames of specialised police units is rare. As concluded by Rantatalo (2012a), no unified research programme, language, or shared canon of knowledge seems to surround these types of organisations. The previously observed gap in the research literature is supported when surveying the fields of police and organisational research in search of empirical studies conducted in and/or on specialised police units, such as SWAT teams or counter-terrorist units. As an example, a wide scan of scholarly research on SPUs from the previous 10 years in the databases of Academic Search Elite, SocIndex, ERIC, E-journals, Business Source Premier, Google Scholar, and Web of Science rendered a list that (after initial

removal of extraneous hits and duplicates) entailed eight studies<sup>1</sup> interspersed within a variety of scholarly fields ranging from international security to applied philosophy.

With few empirical contributions, present examinations of specialised policing tend to be non-cumulative and have been referred to as research targeting odd or unconventional empirical settings (cf. Bamberger & Pratt, 2010). With these limitations in mind, a basic synthesis of present empirical research within the organisational context of SPUs indicates that previous research mainly has focussed on the issues of police training and professional development studied within SPUs, police culture studied within SPUs, SPUs' use of force, and SPUs' management of external contingencies. Although different in scope and aims, a few common denominators can be extracted from these studies.

First, SPU work practice is concluded by many authors to be about reactive responses to critical situations and contingencies. As such, SPUs' work engagements tend to be mission-based (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011; Clark et al., 2000; Jones & Hinds, 2002); involve spatial distribution of personnel (Jones & Hinds, 2002) and, as stated in the introduction to the thesis, be dependent on flexibility in regards to tactical options rather than solely high levels of force (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011). In regards to organisational culture within SPUs, Glomseth and Gottschalk (2008) and Glomseth and Gottschalk (2009) conducted surveys within the Norwegian antiterrorist police (Delta) and found indications that this unit favoured and valued an occupational culture oriented against cooperation, legality, action, and competence. Further, the antiterrorist police force was found by the authors to be characterised by flat power structures, open leadership, and an orientation towards long-time perspectives in work engagements. The authors discussed the collective nature of SPU operations and training directed at team building as factors influencing these results.

A different perspective on occupational culture of SPUs is provided by Dodge, Valcore, & Gomez (2011) and Dodge, Valcore, & Klinger (2010), who studied occupational culture in relation to possibilities for female police officer participation in SPUs. The authors problematise SPUs as a male-dominated stronghold within police authorities both because of structural

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<sup>1</sup> The search was conducted using thesaurus descriptors ("law enforcement" (OR) "police"; (OR) "police team") combined with (Boolean: AND) free-text string searches ("SWAT team"; (OR) "Counter terror\* unit"; (OR) "police security force\*"). Searches were limited to scholarly peer reviewed research dating 10 years back. Truncations (\*) were used to enable searches on word-roots and double quotation marks (") were used to enable phrase search in order to avoid distortion (cf. studies on the issues of teams in general, etc.)

barriers and also because of contextual and cultural tendencies of hyper-masculine, elitist, paramilitary occupational culture. The authors draw on numbers from the U.S national tactical officers association, which in 2001 reported that 17 women were registered as tactical officers out of the association's 40,000 members. Reported structural explanations for the low participation include physical requirements with a focus on upper-body strength, which hinders women from applying for and being accepted as SWAT team members. Women who had worked in SWAT teams reported an outsider status and marginalisation because of male-dominated subculture that sidelined and/or excluded women's participation. Strategies for women SWAT team members to gain acceptance within their work context included suppressing female characteristics in order to fit in, thus 'proving oneself' justified their candidacy for participation (Dodge, Valcore & Klinger, 2010, p. 234). The authors conclude that a likely development regarding women's exclusion from SWAT teams is continuing exclusion, both because of hardships associated with admission to SWAT teams and because of local cultural barriers connected to indoctrination, camaraderie, and cohesion within such units.

### ***Specialised policing as 'hard' policing***

The image of hard-model policing is descriptive of policing that is conducted based on antagonistic relations to the public, and SPUs are often discussed as the example *par excellence* of hard-model policing. When depicting SPUs as hard-model policing, specialised order maintenance squads tend to be exemplified, as these operate reactively through direct intervention and punitive coercion in dangerous situations (Bowling & Foster, 2002; Kraska, 2007). As such, SPU hard policing is often described as directed *against* the ones being policed (Bowling & Foster, 2002; Hopkins-Burke, 2004). This can be contrasted with 'soft policing' models such as 'neighbourhood policing' (Innes, 2005, p. 158) or 'reassurance policing' (Fielding & Innes, 2006, p. 128) (which in Swedish policymaking came to be translated to 'proximity policing' through the 1994 'närpolisreform' (Peterson, 2010, p. 27). Although these models differ from one another, they share the basic idea that police work ideally should be conducted *with* the public through means such as cooperation, problem-solving, accessibility, and knowledge about local events (Bowling & Foster, 2002; McCarthy, 2012; McCulloch, 2001; Peterson, 2010).

In relation to soft models of policing, SPU interventions have been inferred as reactive, incident driven, outdated, and ineffective (in regard of crime prevention) models of policing which isolate the police from the public and thereby hinder the flow of information to the police (Hopkins-Burke, 2004;

Reiner, 2012; Walsh, Stephens, & Moore, 2000). Symbolically, hard policing has been argued to connote to police ideals of physicality, action orientation, danger, and crime fighting and narratives of the police as a 'thin blue line' between order and chaos (Waddington, 1999c p. 299). In a study of police culture in the Swedish police context, Granér (2004), for instance, noted a reoccurring tendency among serving officers to equate hard policing conducted by prestigious SPUs with notions of *real* policing as it involved violent situations, arrests, and interventions. SPUs can also be associated with prevailing notions and cultures of masculinity and machismo expressed through a focus on dangerous interventions with demands for physicality (Herbert, 2001; Kraska, 2001) and manifested in the previously mentioned close to non-existent involvement of female police officers in SPUs (Dodge et al., 2010).

Within the literature on SPUs, the argument has been put forth that hard-model policing, as represented through a proliferation of specialised police units currently is on the increase and that this expansion constitutes a contrasting and parallel development to a contemporary global movement towards 'soft', community-oriented policing approaches (McCulloch, 2001). Kraska (2007), for instance promotes this hypothesis when discussing the U.S. development of SWAT team deployments and puts forth an estimated deployment increase from 3.000 annually during the 1980s to 30.000 annually by 1996 and 40.000 annually by 2001. In a European continental context, Lutterbeck (2004) empirically demonstrated a substantial growth between 1990 and 2000 in terms of personnel and financial supplements to what by the author is defined as military-style police security forces such as the Austrian Federal Gendarmerie, the Spanish Guardia Civil, the German Federal Border Police and the Italian Guardia di Finanza. Although the above studies are conducted in significantly different policing systems and institutional contexts, they both conceptualise proliferation of specialised police as evidence for extensive 'hard' policing, which in its extreme manifestations is visibly military-style in aspects such as hardware, appearance, and operational initiatives. This observation leads to a second tendency in the literature on specialised police units, viz. the affinity to define police specialisation and capacity to use force based on resemblance to military appearance and military use of force.

### ***Specialised policing as military-style policing***

At the 'hard end' of hard policing, specialised police units such as special patrol groups (SPGs), SWAT teams, tactical response teams (TRTs), and other specialised police units of different sorts have tended to be defined based on resemblance to military units and, hence, discussed under the

conceptual headings of paramilitary police units (PPUs) (cf. Rantatalo, 2012a). In relation to riot control, the police approach to mass events that developed following unrest in the 1970s and 1980s has been argued to showcase many military features in both the appearance of the police and preferred 'hard-model' strategies of policing building on direct coercion and 'threat power' (Bujra & Pearce, 2009; Della Porta, Peterson, & Reiter, 2006; Dieu, 1993, p. 155). Jefferson (1990, p. 16) provides an illuminating description of this line of thinking when describing the policing of protests in the early 90s by British specialised patrol groups (SPGs) as paramilitary in appearance:

*Menacing teams of officers, unrecognisable in visored 'NATO-style' crash helmets and fireproof overalls, advancing behind transparent shields being banged by drawn truncheons, making 'search' sorties into crowds of fleeing demonstrators for the purpose of arrest, or a spot of retributive destruction.*

Military-style policing was argued by Jefferson (1990) to evidence increased aggressiveness and provocation in relation to the public, thereby decreasing legitimacy and escalating violence in situations of public disorder (see also Jefferson, 1987, 1993). On the other end of such discussions, the use of hard tactics in policing approaches to public disorder has by its military-influenced, 'command-and-control' style of organisation been argued to contain components that minimise violence. Waddington (1993) represents this view when stating that a military-style police approach to public order is based on stringent organisational principles that direct policing away from: 'individual officers' ... uncoordinated action at their own discretion' (p. 353) and instead vouches for 'a more disciplined response to disorderly and violent situations than is possible by traditional methods' (p. 353). It should be noted that since the above referred discussions about the role of military styled police in crowd control, a lot has happened within this area of policing, both on an organisational level and in research with new concepts favouring dialogue and cooperation between protestors and police. However, the point to be forwarded here is that a still prevailing image of military styled policing in much is rooted in a context of crowd control.

In scholarly fields neighbouring crowd control and policing of riotous situations, SWAT teams and adjacent specialised police tactical units (such as the British SCO19, and German Grenzschutzgruppe 9 [GSG9]) have regularly been equated with paramilitary policing (see for example Haggerty, 1999; Kraska & Paulsen, 1997; Kraska & Kappeler, 1997; Sheptycki, 1999). Specialised police tactical squads have, in this body of research, been described as paramilitary based on their showcased military appearance,

military weaponry, glorification of militarism, and use of punitive methods in policing (Kraska, 2007; Kraska & Paulsen, 1997). Waddington (2001) provides a descriptive account of the striking resemblance between specialised police and military counterparts when stating that:

*These forces appear virtually identical: a dark blue or black hooded coverall; respirators, carrying heckler and Koch MP5 sub-machine guns supplemented with 9mm self-loading side arms; and also equipped with tear-smoke, distraction grenades, and various devices for removing doors and windows. Members of these squads are skilled in techniques of rapid entry, including abseiling down the outside of buildings, and practice engaging armed adversaries. In other words, they bear a striking similarity in appearance, weapons and tactics to military Special Forces.*

To summarise the above-presented metaphors of police specialisation, the fundamental idea behind an inclination to define specialised policing in terms of paramilitary policing builds on a logic of resemblance that within the literature tends to have two expressions: 1) Partly, resemblance is attributed through what can be called *face value*, which means that paramilitary policing is defined in terms of resemblance in appearance and style between SPUs and military counterparts in aspects such as relation to the public and situational contingencies: 2) Partly resemblance also tends to be attributed through SPUs' use of violence, which is argued to be similar to that of military technocratic use of force. In this line of thought, one can, from a resemblance perspective, plot different types of policing on a soft vs. hard continuum which, if it was to be extended, would contain the archetypical image of soft-model policing as one of the poles and the archetype of the military as a counter pole (see Table 1).



**Table 1.** Common ways (in the literature) to define police specialisation based on degree of resemblance to the military. The table categorises the police's relation to the public; coercive capacity and situational contingencies coupled to different models of policing.

	<b>Soft-model policing</b>	<b>Hard- model policing</b>	<b>Paramilitary policing</b>	<b>Military</b>
<b>Relation to the public</b>	With the public	Partially against the public	Parts of community viewed as enemies	Non- recognisant of citizenship
<b>Coercive capacity</b>	Potential authoritative intervention	Direct exercise of violence	Punitive methods of policing	Indiscriminate use of force
<b>Actualised in</b>	Situations with individual criminal violence, social misdemeanours	Threats to public order	Highly violent situations	War and warlike situations

### ***Critiquing resemblance definitions of specialised policing***

As highlighted by Rantatalo (2012a), resemblance logics like the ones summarised in Table 1 above are problematic, as they use the term 'paramilitary' as a descriptor for SPUs. First, the notion that SPUs are paramilitary can be argued to lack explanatory value as there presently is no clear consensus regarding what paramilitary policing entails. The tendency in research to make use of the conceptual heading of 'paramilitary' has, as shown, been to either define SPUs in terms of showcased military style of policing or in functional terms. From the 'style' perspective, 'paramilitary police' becomes an umbrella concept incorporating all types of specialised police that, in different aspects, showcase military features (cf. Kraska & Kappeler, 1997; Kraska & Paulsen, 1997). With such a definition, units such as SWAT teams, tactical units, counter-terrorist units, special patrol groups, gendarmeries, and other types of police security forces have been connected to the paramilitary conceptual heading (Rantatalo, 2012a). However, if this argument is taken to its core, all police forces – routine as well as specialised – in a basic sense resemble the military, as many modern police organisations were modelled after military counterparts (cf. Leichtman, 2007) and in a contemporary perspective bear traces of this in aspects such

as uniform, rank structure, centralised control, specified nomenclatures, and overwhelmingly male representation (Cowper, 2000; Leichtman, 2007).

Further, definitions of SPUs based on use of violence tend to draw on the notion that specialised police are manifestations of extreme hard-model policing, which sees 'at least sections of the community as the enemy against whom high levels of force are justified' (McCulloch, 2001). But such lines of thought have, upon scrutiny, been argued to 'obscure a crucial difference between how the military and the police use force' (Waddington, 1999b, p. 132). The counter argument builds on the previously mentioned notion that police use of force needs to be minimised in order to be legitimate because it is directed at citizens within a civil society. As such, the violence showcased by SPUs is, in opposition to military tactics, rooted in recognition of citizenship and hence discriminate (i.e. it is aimed at specific instances of deviance within a defined social order).

In relation to police, military use of force is to a larger extent indiscriminate, which means that it is generally directed at an enemy that is not recognised as part of the public. From this perspective, increased proliferation of SPUs and 'hard tactics' policing cannot be taken as evidence for police militarisation, but rather as symptomatic of developments towards hardening or increasingly divided societal climates characterised by an 'escalation of non-military force' (Waddington, 1999b, p. 134).

Given the difficulties of defining specialised police in terms of paramilitary or military-style policing, a strictly functional use of the term 'paramilitary policing' has been advocated from a scholarly point of view (Brodeur, 2010; Hills, 1995). From this perspective, PPU are viewed as police who operate in liaison with, on behalf of, or organise under military institutions (Hills, 1995; Waddington, 1999b). This definition of paramilitary policing is indeed sufficient and viable in discussions of police systems' institutional arrangements. However, when applied as a descriptor for SPUs, it is an unsatisfactory designation as functionally defined paramilitary policing does not by necessity bear resemblance to SPU work practice. For instance, organisations such as the French Gendarmerie Nationale (GN) and the well-known Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) are from a functional perspective paramilitary through institutional coupling with their respective countries' ministries of defence. These organisations, however, are characterised by relatively low degrees of military features if compared to military special units. Gendarmeries are also in large part devoted to routine policing tasks. For instance, the French GN has as its main responsibility policing roads, small towns, and rural communities (Waddington, 1999a). Functional definitions of paramilitaries can thus be concluded to be inadequate in

discussions about SPUs. This conclusion is supported by Bayley's (1985) observations that a police force that is adjacent to the military by definition represents the opposite of police specialisation, as the police in these contexts do not monopolize the mandate to use force.

Based on the brief review above, it can be concluded that the term 'paramilitary' as a concept describing SPUs is unclear in content. Likewise, the tendency to define SPUs as military on face-value resemblances to the military results in broad and vague descriptions which, together, dissociate types of policing such as riot control, order maintenance, and counter-terrorism. Thus, in the present literature, the notion of paramilitary policing appears to be a floating signifier with a multitude of connotations. This brings about the question of how one alternatively can define specialised policing and SPUs in an analytically viable manner.

## **Towards a reconceptualisation**

In the following, an attempt to reconceptualise SPUs is provided that allows for separation of different types of police tactical units and security forces. The previously reviewed tendency to view the type of policing conducted by these units as 'hard-model policing' marks a general starting point in this reconceptualisation. The notion that the concept of specialised policing is equivalent with specialisation in use of force is pursuant with a PUFPP understanding of the police mandate and consistent with Bayley's (1985) definition of specialisation. However, when used exclusively, this criterion lacks explanatory power, as it does not allow for separation of different types of SPUs and, to an extent, different task areas for which these units are organised. This has resulted in a propensity to conflate different types of crowd-control, riot-control, SWAT-oriented, and counter-terrorist units in what has been referred to as a 'mixed bag' of police tactical units (Waddington, 1999b). In the following, it is argued that a possible way to provide an analytically viable conceptualisation of SPUs is to complement the demarcation of soft vs. hard policing with the application of the concepts of 'high' and 'low' policing (together abbreviated to HLP). These concepts were not originally developed for analysis of SPUs, and a re-application thereby calls for a brief presentation of high and low policing.

### ***Introducing high and low policing (HLP)***

The concepts of high and low policing as used in this thesis were originally theorised by Brodeur (1983, see also 2007; 2010) as concepts that serve to describe task areas of the police based on proximity to societal seats of power (Bayley & Weisburd, 2011). In this context, neither 'high' nor 'low' implies

normative connotations such as bad, better than, or more desirable. Rather, HLP has evolved as an area of study that is rooted in an observation that police in contemporary societies do not only engage in traditional activities such as patrols and order maintenance but also engage in what O'Reilly and Ellison (2006 p. 641) defined as 'the maintenance and promotion of the state and dominant political actors, reaching beyond the collection and dissemination of criminal intelligence'. With this recognition, the divide between low policing and high policing has come to depict the difference between mundane task areas of the police concerning order maintenance and threats towards individuals within society (low) and policing concerned with national security (high). Lowe (2011) describes this difference through the concepts of macro crimes and micro crimes.

Macro crimes are, in this terminology, threats and crimes that are system-threatening on a societal level, whilst micro crimes denote threats towards individuals within societies. High policing is, in this aspect, concerned with crimes and threats aimed towards the preservation of specific political regimes (which, in liberal democratic societies, translates to the concept of state apparatuses). As highlighted by Brodeur and Leman-Langlois (2006), the aim towards preserving state interests does not automatically imply that high policing is oriented towards protection of civil society. When the protection of state interests and societal order are at odds, high policing has been put forth as being aimed at preserving the order and distribution of power of a given regime (Brodeur, 1983). Within contemporary liberal democratised societies, high policing has further been observed to be managed by state security agencies concerned with detection and apprehension of political dissenters and terrorists and protection of the central government. A Swedish example would be the Security Service (SÄPO), which organises for tasks such as these. Another example derived from the literature includes the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) cf. Brodeur, 1983; Bayley & Weisburd, 2011). As the primary focus in high policing is protection of state interests, high policing has been argued to deviate from the ethos and norms by which routine policing is governed in several distinguishing ways:

First, high policing has been argued to showcase operational tactics which are extraordinary and sometimes extra-legal in relation to mundane policing. Examples include extensive gathering of security intelligence, such as registration of commonplace activities (Brodeur & Dupont, 2006; Lowe, 2011; Manning, 2012).

Further, high policing has been argued to be highly secretive (Sheptycki, 2007) and is often exercised through the use of extraordinary tactics and

special operations, such as covert surveillance and infiltration, in order to expand operational space (O'Reilly & Ellison, 2006). This tendency to deviate from the mundane practice of policing has been argued to result in high policing being, by nature, less transparent, less accountable, and less considerate of human rights than low policing (Bayley & Weisburd, 2011).

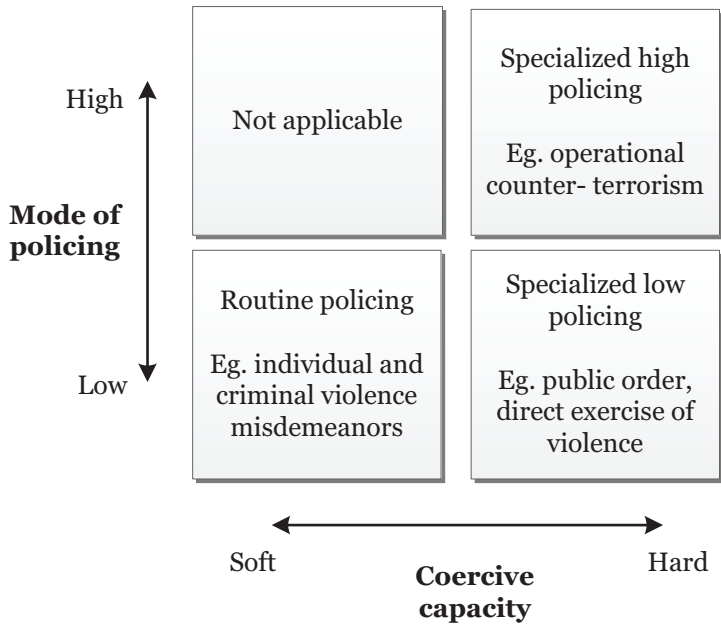
High policing is, as briefly highlighted above, also concerned with different types of security issues than routine policing. In the security discourse post the terrorist attacks of 9/11, high policing has gained renewed interest within the research community as it has been argued to be an important facet of many countries' counter-terrorist strategies. Manning (2012) provides an overview of recent HLP literature and concludes that a prevailing focus within this field of research has targeted questions of political surveillance and absorbent policing, meaning extensive collection of intelligence through technology-supported practices such as data mining.

### ***Connecting the HLP paradigm to specialised police units***

With strong connotations of covert intelligence and knowledge work, the concept of high policing may seem a distant concept to employ in the endeavour of differentiating SPUs' operative practices. This is because SPUs, at first glance certainly would qualify as low policing in their distinct 'hard-model' focus on overt counter-violence and enforcement of social order, which at baseline derives from the police's use-of-force mandate. Simultaneously, high policing at its core seems to depict contemporary security intelligence agencies' covert surveillance and conflation of legislative, judicial, and executive powers (Brodeur, 2010). However, as high-policing agencies can be defined by proximity to societal seats of power, the argument can be put forth that different types of SPUs in a similar way can be differentiated by proximity to high police agencies and/or high policing functions within established policing systems. In such a line of argument, the high-police concept may serve as an analytic tool, which in Marx's (2013) words 'can be used to analyse social control settings', as it 'provides a systematic way to identify variation and to think about explanations and consequences of the different ways of doing policing' (Section 3, para. 28). Reapplied in the context of SPUs, two components of the high-policing concept become of importance, viz. 1) the emphasis on close proximity to governance and state interests and 2) appliance of extraordinary policing measures that follows by such proximity. In the context of police specialisation, these components can be translated into the notion that different types of SPUs can be defined and differentiated based on how close they reside to high-policing agencies and state interests and

how such proximity feeds into the operational strategies and methodologies of different types of SPUs.

With such a demarcation, riot control, SWAT units, counter-terrorist units and other types and forms of police security forces can be concluded to be similar in that they represent hard-model policing building on coercion; however, these types of organisations can also be concluded to be different based on proximity to state interests and thereto allowed operational space. Last (2010) exemplifies this line of thought when stating that police forces concerned with operative counter-terrorism responses or operational hard-model policing of politically spurred disturbances are engaging in what the author terms 'coercive high policing' (Last, 2010 p. 14). Likewise, Innes and Thiel (2008), in an HLP model of the U.K. counter-terrorism apparatus, define counter-terrorist specialists concentrated on arrests and disruption of terrorist-spawned incidents in terms of high policing, as operational counter-terrorism is conducted in close proximity to security agencies. With these notions, a basic ideal type division of SPUs can be constructed based on whether they are established for and mainly concerned with crimes directed at the public or whether they operate adjacent to high-policing agencies and/or are established and concerned primarily with state security issues. This basic division can further be complemented with a soft-vs.-hard continuum in order to highlight how policing conducted by SPUs is distinguished from routine police work (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Differentiating routine policing and specialised policing based on demarcations of high/low policing and soft/hard policing.

As seen in the figure, the bottom left box marks routine policing conducted by public police forces and the two right boxes mark specialised, hard-model policing. The top left box is marked 'Not applicable'. This is because the combination of high and soft policing entails an oxymoron. As Brodeur (2010) states, high policing has as its primary focus to serve state interests. These may in turn coincide with the interests of the general community within a state as a secondary effect – as can be argued to be the case in modern democratised societies wherein the police mandate ideally emanates from the public. However, the point to be put forth is that high-policing agencies as defined above in cases where state and public interests deviate primarily are designed to uphold and sustain prevailing power relations. As such, high policing is not primarily concerned with the public, nor is it conducted 'with' the public. This is however one of the defining aspects of soft-model policing, thus making the combination of high and soft policing non-applicable. Lastly, the top right box marks 'operational counter terrorism', which is defined based on the nature of terror crimes as concerned with policing relative to state interests.

## **Applying the model in the context of Swedish policing**

In the following, an examination of the Swedish police's main areas of responsibility and intervention resources is offered in attempt to move towards a differentiation of SPUs within a Swedish context using the presented conceptual framework.

### ***The Swedish police system***

The Swedish police system can be defined as a centralised system based on a singular national police service answering to the ministry of justice<sup>2</sup>. The mission, duties, powers, organisation, and goals of the Swedish police are stated in the police act (Polislag of 1984:387 which, in its 2 § – known as the 'mission' clause – enumerates the five main responsibilities of the Swedish police (Lauritz, 2009). Flyghed (2000a), drawing on Berggren and Munck (1992; see also Berggren and Munck, 2011), has provided exemplified task areas which relate to the mission clause (see Table 2):

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<sup>2</sup> That is, the Swedish police do not entail a two- or multi-tiered system with different police agencies on state, federal and county levels. The Swedish police is however organizationally divided into different geographical districts, as will be discussed in the following.



**Table 2.** The Swedish police's main responsibilities as stated by 2 § of the police act and exemplified activities of the police.

<b>Police act formulations of police responsibility<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Exemplified activities</b>
1) Prevention of crime and disturbances of public order and safety	Preventive activities such as information directed to persons who are not subject to judicial action
2) Monitoring of public order and safety, prevention of disruptions thereof, and interventions when disruptions have occurred	General, specific, and object monitoring, such as patrolling/responding to emergencies, traffic surveillance, hunting and fishing control, border control, public events, and state visits
3) Gathering of intelligence and investigating criminal offences that are subject to judicial action	Mainly reactive activities such as taking up police reports, gathering of intelligence, and forensic and general investigating
4) the provision of safety, information, and other assistance to the public	Mainly service responsibilities, such as information and remedial measures in case of accidents
5) conduction of other activities which are relevant for the police in concordance with special regulation	General administrative duties such as licensing (e.g. scrapyards; hotel businesses; demonstrations, etc.); arms control; issuing of passports; aiding social services; and social care in apprehensions

At the local level, the above-exemplified (Table 2) areas of responsibility are carried out within the Swedish system by county district police authorities. In total, Sweden is currently divided into 21 such police authorities, each of which is led by a district police chief commissioner and a local police board (Furuhagen, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> These are the thesis author's translation from SFS, 1984:387 2§.

In addition to local districts, the Swedish police organises a National Police Board (NPB) (in Swedish; *Rikspolisstyrelse*) as the central administrative and directorial authority. The NPB serves as a link between government and police authorities and, in this role, oversees the police counties and answers for coordination and rationalisation of the police from a national perspective. Connected to the role as main directorial authority for the Swedish police, the NPB also directs activities such as police training, investigation of internal affairs, housing an ethical committee, and developing police methods and support systems. In addition, the NPB also directs and conducts operational policing when this is of national interest, such as policing aimed at the prevention and detection of offences against national security (National Police Board, 2013; SFS, 1989:773). This role of the NPB is organised through the sections of the National Bureau of Investigation/Criminal Police (*Rikskriminalpolisen*) and the Swedish Security Service (*Säkerhetspolisen*). The National Bureau of Investigation has as its main responsibilities, according to the police, to hinder organised crime, conduct international police work, safeguard preparedness for emergencies and special events, and, in addition, combat a variety of quantity and serial crimes. The Swedish Security Service in turn has as its main areas of responsibility to prevent and detect crimes against national security, which mainly amounts to counter-terrorism and protection of the central government. Examples of work tasks include intelligence gathering and analysis, counter-intelligence, and protecting members of the central government and the royal family (National Police Board, 2013; SFS 1989:773).

As of 2015, the Swedish police will face major reorganisation, whereby the 21 local police districts will be merged into a singular authority. At the time of writing this thesis, a state investigation (SOU 2012:13) has been reported that suggests this change based on several identified issues with the current organisation of the police. Examples of current problem areas include unclear mandate for the national police board over control of local authorities; differences in management philosophy and organisational structures between the local police authorities; problems with the maintenance of specialist knowledge and competence in smaller rural districts; and problems connected with operative cooperation and national coordination when working with crime that transgress or reach beyond geographical district boundaries (cf. SOU 2012:13).

## ***SPU resources of the Swedish Police in overview<sup>4</sup>***

Following a PUFPP definition of police specialisation, Sweden can be concluded to have a number of SPUs that have somewhat differing areas of responsibility on both national and local levels.

Nationally, the police organise four specialised police units, consisting of three Piket police units located in Sweden's three biggest cities (Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö) and a national counter-terrorist unit located in Stockholm. Taken together, the Piket units employ approximately 180–200 police officers (information varies, Hjort, 2010) and can be described as tactical units that, according to official police information (National Police Board, 2013) have as main areas of responsibility to operationally engage in difficult and dangerous situations wherein tactical approaches are called for. As put forth by Engström (2007), the term 'Piket' has its etymological roots in military nomenclature (i.e. the French word *piquet*, in English *picket*), which originally signified a small band of forward observers. Maybe because of the name, some confusion can be concluded to prevail regarding how to denote the Piket units in relation to specialised police units. For instance Lioe (2011) defines the Swedish Piket in terms of an anti-riot squad, whilst Nylén (2006) suggests that the units can be translated into SWAT (special weapons and tactics) units. Engström (2007) further concludes that, due to principles of management of objectives, the three local police authorities that house Piket units have some levels of autonomy in deciding questions regarding establishment, dimensions, equipment, recruitment, and training of their task forces, which creates conditions for variation in mission statements and organisation between different district Piket units. A common denominator among Sweden's three Piket units is that they are specialised at coercion and intervention, particularly in dangerous situations, and that they have dual roles in that they are organised through local police counties and as such have a local focus, but also serve as national support resources for other police counties when called for. For instance, the Stockholm Piket conducts approximately 10% of its operations in its role as national support, according to Engström (2007).

The fourth Swedish national intervention resource is the Swedish national counter-terrorist unit (NI). As the name implies, the NI has as its main area

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<sup>4</sup> The reader should be aware that the following presentation is based on official, publicly released governmental and police documents and other publicly published sources. Some information regarding Swedish police intervention resources is currently classified by the police. As such, the presentation lacks certain types of information (examples include geographical and numerical information about regional intervention resources and certain operational engagements of the SPUs).

of responsibility to conduct direct counter-terrorism interventions (SFS, 1989:773). The unit was installed as a result of concerns about the Swedish police preparedness for terrorism and serious criminal attacks following in the wake of high-profile terrorist incidents in Sweden in the 1970s and the 1986 assassination of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme (Flyghed, 2000b; Hansén, 2007). In a parliamentary investigation (SOU 1988:18), a counter-terrorist unit was proposed as a force to use in exceptional cases where there was a need for special confrontational tactics (Flyghed, 2000b). The SOU proclaimed that the unit should be used only in extreme cases when all other measures had failed, and then it should only act on direct command from the head of government (or, in exceptional cases, the Minister of Justice). Furthermore, the proposal from the investigators suggested that the unit would be equipped with special weaponry such as sniper rifles, tear gas, and explosive devices. The unit was also suggested to have special competencies in diving, negotiation tactics, and medical care (SOU 1988:18).

The transformation from political ambitions to a concrete organisation started in 1990 after the Swedish parliament concluded on the subject and the organisation of a task force was initiated (Flyghed, 2000b). The NI was modelled after already established specialised counter-terrorist units in other countries, such as the German GSG9 and the Norwegian Beredskaps-troppen Delta, which had been operational since the 1970s (Weibull, 2002). The NI has been operational since 1991 and has undergone several changes since its instalment, including changes in residence within the Swedish policing system and a continuing expansion of task assignments (Weibull, 2000; Engström, 2007; Flyghed, 2000b). In a review of the NI's history, Flyghed (2000b) put forth two prominent changes, with the first taking place in 1999 when the NI's assignment to counter-terrorism operations was widened and the task force received mandate to engage in other situations than were originally permitted. Furthermore, the demand for governmental legislation for the deployment of the unit was ceased and the mandate to engage the unit transferred to the Stockholm police district. With this change the unit became available nationwide as a specialised resource to local police districts (according to 17§ in the police statute). Another substantial change took place in 2002 when the NI was organisationally transferred from the Stockholm police to the national police board's national bureau of investigation. At present, this is where the unit is organised, and its main tasks are 1) counter terrorism and 2) engagement as a nationwide support resource in other interventions when requested by local police districts. The unit also has responsibility for chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive (CBRNE) preparedness within the Swedish police (National Police Board, 2011a). Examples of interventions include:

- Interventions in dangerous situations
- Interventions demanding negotiation tactics
- Interventions in hostage situations
- Observation and mapping of difficult or complex surroundings
- Diving missions (chemical, oxygen, and smoke-helmeted diving)
- Participation in other situations wherein the unit's special training and competence contribute to successful handling of an incident  
(National Police Board, 2004)

In addition to the Swedish police's national intervention resources, Sweden has faced a development wherein separate police district, due to differing community demands, have instated specialised police intervention resources that operate locally and regionally (Engström, 2007; Hammargren, 2006; Magnusson, 2006). Examples of such local demands for intervention resources include the Swedish police districts that house nuclear power plants and districts in the northern rural parts of Sweden wherein response times from the national resources are longer due to geographical distance (Engström, 2007). In a published press release, the Norrbotten police authority (see Norrbotten police authority, 2007) disclosed that different police districts have chosen different solutions to local needs for intervention units. The situation can thereby be described as one wherein the size, organisational placement, and available funds for these units vary. Likewise, the regional intervention units also differ in terms of competence and possibilities for training and professional development. A common employment solution in the regional units is that police officers within these units work part time in their roles as resource capacity and part time in regular service (Engström, 2007). Due to local variations and lack of transparency, information about regional intervention units is scarce, however, these response units can be concluded to organise mainly for local demands, be of varying sizes, and differ in regards to training and deployment.

### ***Differentiating the Swedish SPU resources based on soft/hard and high/low demarcations***

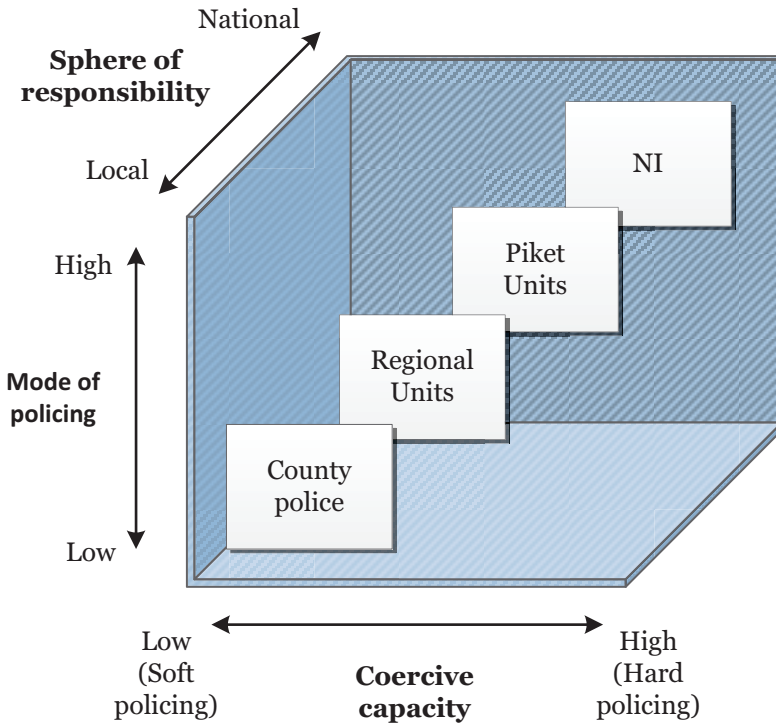
Looking at the different types of specialised police resources presented above from the perspectives of low/high and soft/hard policing, a few points can be put forth.

On a soft-vs.-hard continuum, all referenced specialised police resources are predominantly characterised by conducting hard policing; however, some important degrees of difference can be identified. In regards to the regional intervention resources, a common solution is that these organisations

operate in a part-time manner, thereby complementing interventions and coercive policing with other types of police work, such as traffic control and investigative work. In contrast, the three Piket units and the national counter-terrorist unit are full-time specialised police units that, within the frames of their national responsibilities, are refined towards conducting interventions. However, between the Piket and the NI there are also differences in regards to operational space. The NI has been argued to be the prevailing resource in regards to violent situations (cf. National Police Board, 2004; 2011a), something which legitimates a capacity of extraordinary coercive measures. In this matter, a major discussion regarding Swedish SPU's has regarded what kinds of weapons and methods the different units are allowed to use. The national police board's Ethics Council has, for instance, concluded with reference to proportionality principles regarding police use of force that the Piket units should be prohibited from using certain methods and materials, with notable examples being special sniper rifles, distraction grenades, and explosive door enforcements. According to the Council, measures such as these are exclusively dedicated to the NI as means to allow them to, 'by virtue of their legal powers carry out their tasks' (cf. National Police Board, 2005 p.22; see also Töllborg, 2010).

Also from a high versus low perspective, differentiation of intervention resources can be made. Here it can be concluded that regional intervention resources, with their focus primarily on local communities' needs for order, maintenance, and reinforcement, are predominantly concerned with low-policing task areas, which are defined in terms of threats towards individuals within society. The Piket, in turn, can be argued to have a local anchoring but also function as a national support resource with closer proximity to state interests. Lastly, with its organisational placement within the national police board and with counter-terrorism as its central area of responsibility, the NI can be argued to reside closely to high-policing agencies and thereby also closely to state interests. As concluded in a national police board (2011) report about the NI's role within the national bureau of investigations, the NI should have a clear strategic direction from the NPB. It is also suggested within the report that the NI streamlines its operations towards the main task area of counter-terrorism and that the endeavour of conducting counter-terrorism at large is dependent on cooperation with the Swedish security service. This line of thought was repeated in an interview broadcast on national television by the former Commissioner for the Swedish National Bureau of Investigations, Klas Friberg, who stated that, in order to pursue its role, the NI has tight bonds to the secret service in regards to intelligence exchange, reconnaissance, and jointly planned operational interventions. Furthermore, the Commissioner stated that the breadth of such cooperation; for instance, a number of joint operational interventions aimed at counter-

terrorism contain confidential information, which does not get reported officially (SVT, 2013). Based on these differences regarding the demarcations of high/low and soft/hard policing and the above outlined differences in local/national responsibilities of the presented SPUs, the Swedish police system's collected intervention resources can be illustrated as follows (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Overview of Swedish SPU resources based on geographical spheres of responsibility, mode of policing, and coercive capacity.

As indicated by the model presented above, proximity to state interests (and hence national interests) correlates with a larger coercive capacity and hence operational space for an SPU. This conceptualisation, whilst being tentative in nature, serves to explain some major differences between SPUs that previously have been somewhat neglected in the literature.

With the contextual orientation presented above, the NI's role and purpose within the Swedish policing system are explicated. As such, the following chapter concerns the theoretical underpinnings of the empirical studies that have been conducted in this context.

# An educational outlook on SPU organising

*To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an on-going, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, 'What's the story?'" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 410)*

The following chapter aims to sketch out foundational theoretical concepts and concept relations for the present thesis. The chapter begins with a brief introduction of (mainly Swedish) educational perspectives on working life research (what in Swedish may be referred to as *arbetslivspedagogik*, henceforth abbreviated PIA) in order to contextualise the present thesis within a wider scholarly field of research. Following this, the chapter introduces processual ontological theorising as a theoretical foundation that has underpinned the empirical studies of the present thesis. Third, drawing on processual ontology, the chapter introduces the concepts of sensemaking and organising and discusses these as social and educative processes. As sensemaking and organising have been infrequently used within the PIA field of research, a brief conceptual examination is offered in which the educational potential of the concepts is expounded. This examination has two directions, as it first encircles how organisational sensemaking has been theorised previously and second moves towards an explanation of how these concepts are employed as guides for enquiry in the present thesis.

## Work and organisation from an educational perspective

In 2005, the journal, *Educational Research in Sweden*, published a special issue on PIA research (Ellström, Löfberg, & Svensson, 2005). In this issue, a number of studies were presented with the common denominator that they focussed upon educational study objects such as learning, knowledge development, competence, interactions, and meaning-making in different contexts of work practice (Döös & Wilhelmson, 2005; Ellström, 2005; Granberg & Ohlsson, 2005; Gustavsson, 2005; Svensson, 2005; Thång & Wärvik, 2005). Most of the studies in the issue, as well as in other contemporary examples of PIA-oriented research (cf. Hagström, 2007; Johansson, 2011), share two common and basic features:

First, PIA-oriented research, as well as educational research in general, is predominantly focussed on questions regarding the development of human subjects through the study of different kinds of educative social and cognitive processes. These can, in turn, be conceptualised on different aggregated



levels of analysis. PIA, in this sense, relates to a central educational line of thought in that it concerns the study of processes that inform human action and development (see Lindberg & Berge, 1988) or, as stringently formulated by Dewey (1985), processes which spur 'reconstruction or re-organisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience' (pp. 82–83). Examples of such processes include societal reproduction, cultivation, socialisation, fosterage, 'bildung', and individual as well as collective learning (see Englund, 2004, 2006; Uljens, 2001a, 2001b).

Second, as the term *work-life education* self-evidently implies, PIA-oriented educational research concerns educative processes located within occupational settings or within the wider frames of working life. As such, work life-oriented educational research diverges from mainstream educational research, which predominantly is concerned with the study of intentional social forming manifested in school settings and educational institutions (cf. Billett, 2002; Dahllöf, 2000). Whilst such institutions are systematised and goal oriented towards objectives such as learning, 'bildung', and societal socialisation, work-life educational research targets a context in which processes of social forming may be secondary to goals such as production, service performance, and, as is the case in the present thesis, policing.

As a consequence of an orientation to work life, conceptualisations of *organisation* and connections to organisation theory can be argued to be of central importance for educational researchers interested in educative processes within working life. Two main ways to approach the concept of organisation can here be put forth as prevailing within the field of PIA research:

The first approach conceptualises organisations in terms of environments, sites, or spaces with impact for the different educative processes under study. From this perspective, organisations can be conceptualised based on the effects of the organisation on the educative processes under study. Examples include studies of how organisations may constrain or promote learning, manifestations of competence and competence development within different types of organisations, how individuals learn experientially in organisational environments (Ellström, Ekholm, & Ellström, 2008; Illeris, 2004, 2011).

However, organisation can also be seen as a process by itself if it is conceptualised in terms of on-going coordination of resources and actions during goal-oriented activity, as put forth by, for instance, Granberg &

Ohlsson (2005); Ohlsson and Stedt (2003); and Ohlsson (2004). From such a view, the concept of organisation becomes what Czarniawska (2008 p.5) denotes a social 'state of affairs' rather than an environment, entity, or agent (a 'small leviathan', to paraphrase Czarniawska). A processual view of organisation thus emphasises that organisations, defined as objects, are constituted out of organising in the sense of on-going accomplishments of meaning-making. As such, the claim can be made that organising is an actively educative process in the sense that it entails a social orientation of experience that is directive for future actions. This marks a central departure point for the present thesis, as the above presented conceptualisation invites questions regarding how processes of organisation emerge, unfold, and promote certain coordinated actions. Examinations of these questions are empirically offered in the studies of the present thesis. In the following, they will be theoretically elaborated in depth.

## **A processual ontological perspective**

A processual perspective on the social world can, as theorised here, in its most basic form be said to constitute a transition from an outlook on reality as constituent of *nouns* to a perspective that sees the social world as constituent of *verbs* (Bakken & Hernes, 2006). The philosophical rooting of such a perspective can, in condensed form, be said to rest on pragmatist relational ontological grounds and social constructionist epistemology. The relational dimension underpinning a processual perspective means that, instead of seeing the world as constituted by *a priori* substances and objects, the existence of such phenomena has to be inferred differentially through relational attributions of meaning.

Drawing on a relational departure point, Chia (2003) and Tsoukas and Chia (2002) define process ontology as an ontology of *becoming*, wherein reality is viewed as inherently fluid and abundant, and the concepts of static existence (objects) in a formal sense entail temporal constructs defined relationally out of bundles of experience. Processes can thus not be reduced to or said to belong to entities as alterations within and between pre-existent objects. Rather, process is endemic as the constituent of entities. As Bohm (cited in Chia, 2003, p. 106) states: 'Not only is everything changing, but all is flux. That is to say *what is* is the process of becoming itself, whilst all objects, events, entities, structures, etc., are forms that can be abstracted from this process'.

The epistemological consequence of a processual ontology is that the social world needs to be assembled and ascribed meaning (i.e. constructed) in

order to be graspable (Hernes, 2008). In the words of pragmatist William James (1975, 1976), we conceive the social world in the form of 'drops of experience' abstracted out of an undifferentiated whole with an abundance of meaning – a singular 'stream of experience'.

The processes by which the world is perceived and understood can, in turn, be said to amount to the subject's interactions or 'transactions' with the world (cf. Dewey, 1981). As such, reality becomes distinguishable, categorised, and segmented by the means of subjects' productive activities (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Through activity in the world, subjects attribute meaning to phenomena and, as such, produce these phenomena as 'minute selections' of concreteness from a plethora of potential meaning (Whithead, 1938). At a basic level, a processual perspective thus asserts that notions of concreteness – entities – amount, when analysed, to temporally and spatially frozen reductions of experience. With this notion, reality becomes a constantly perpetual accomplishment (hence the analogy to verbs); which, however, is made sense of through constructs and frames (the nouns of the world) (cf. Chia, 1999; Hernes & Maitlis, 2012).

The view of the subject's ontological status presented above asserts that the only meaningful level of reality is the series of transactions through which we create and construct meaning. Such constructs thus cannot be judged based on correspondence criteria between reality and perception, as there is simply no static, substantial, nominal, or transcendental meta-standard (or, in the words of Quine, 1996 p. 275, 'cosmic exile') to assume (cf. Rorty, 1989). With the notion that what are graspable from a human perspective are abstractions and selections from a perpetual 'stream of experience', there is no subsuming superstructure of *res extensa* that determines knowledge about the world. Rather, as subjects stand in a transactional relation to reality, the acting human can be said to always be productively in touch with reality. In turn, this standpoint refutes the divide between the internal and external. As individuals are productively in contact with reality through activities, it is this point of contact that defines how reality is manifested (rather than the other way around – that a subsuming structure corresponds with and determines our perceptions of reality) and entities can, therefore, at a baseline be defined as nothing but events (i.e. happenings) with meaning connoted to them (cf. Biesta & Burbules, 2003). These axiomatic theoretical premises beg the question of how the development of temporally and local agreements upon events then comes to be formed and how such formation can be pursued empirically.

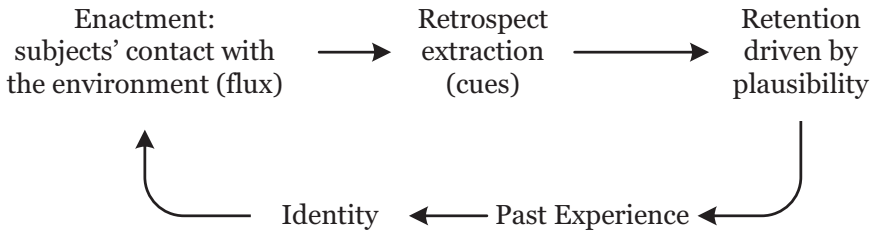
## Making sense of flux

In the following, the concept of sensemaking will be a guiding metaphor used to understand the processes by which flux is constructed as graspable. As different notions of the sensemaking concepts prevail within the literature, an initial establishment is that the conceptualisation drawn upon here amounts to the sensemaking concepts as initially developed by Weick (1979, 1993, 1995,) and since then, further developed by a range of scholars (Bakken & Hernes, 2006; Colville, Hennestad & Thoner., 2013; Czarniawska, 2006; Hernes and Maitlis, 2012; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2007; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Patriotta, 2003; Sutcliffe, Brown, & Putnam, 2006).

As indicated, the concept of sensemaking serves to elucidate how a reality characterised by verbs and *doings* through processes of meaning creation is transformed into an epistemological dimension of nouns and *things* (Bakken & Hernes, 2006). Initially, the word sensemaking points in a direction where on-going socio constructive processes (a continuous *making*) are endemic for the how sense is constructed. The prefix *sense* is somewhat more complicated, as it seems to imply registering (e.g. sensing) of something external (i.e. objects, entities), which – through the activity of interpretation – can be translated into a tangible, apprehensible form. However, as put forth by Weick (1995), such a view analytically presupposes an entitative ontological perspective of static external reality. If the departure point is process-based, the notion of sense implies that the sensible need is to be constructed through action. Following Biesta and Burbules (2003), such a perspective amounts to a reversal of how we regularly think about objects as starting points for knowledge acquisition to a perspective where objects are the result of such processes. Reality *out there* is thus not waiting to be registered and can hence not be sensed objectively, as summarised by Weick (1995, p. 55): 'the sensible need not be sensible'.

The view promoted from a sensemaking perspective is that sense can be said to materialise as it is made; events are thereby literally constructed through the meaning-making activities of individuals (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). In condensed form, Weick (1978; 1995), describes how such processes unfold with an analogy to three main processes that take place in the subjects' transitive interactions with the environment: *enactment* (saying/acting meaning), *extraction of cues* (seeing what is said retrospectively), and retention of cues through assessments of *plausibility* (the remembering of sense; transformation into knowledge). Drawing on Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) and Jennings and Greenwood (2009),

the relation between these processes are schematically described in figure 3 (see Figure 3), which in the following will be detailed.



**Figure 3.** Sensemaking conceptualised as processes of enactment, retrospect extraction, and retention of experience feeding into future processes of sensemaking.

An initial point to make regarding the schema above is that the subject (or subjects) enactment marks the starting point for sensemaking. Sense is thereby, according to the framework, dependent on subjects' interactions with an ever-changing environment. The concept of enactment is an expression of the view that people, through actions (cf. 'doings', 'speech acts'), create their environments – not the other way around. Weick (1995, p. 31) states that when people act they 'undertake undefined space, time, and action, and draw lines, establish categories, and coin new labels that create new features of the environment that did not exist before'. Thus, action defines cognition within the framework and, as subjects always are 'in touch' with the social world, enactment can be denoted as an on-going process (Hernes, 2008). In short, the focus on enactment thus entails a view wherein thinking and interpreting is preceded by acting and, as a result, action is in this sense quite formally a necessity for meaning.

Following enactment, figure 3 highlights that sense is materialised through retrospective extraction of meaning from the environment. As mentioned above, the constructive processes by which events are created by necessity involves reduction from an abundant flow of potential meaning. Weick draws on Schützian social phenomenology and ethnomethodology in asserting that this process, by necessity, is retrospective. As stated by Schütz (1967, p. 215):

*The meaning of a lived experience can be reduced to a turning of the attention to an already elapsed experience, in the course of which the latter is lifted out of the stream of consciousness and identified as an experience constituted in such a way and in no other.*

The point made by Schütz is that meaning only emerges through retrospective glances in which discreteness is produced (i.e. discrete events). Such glances are dependent on intentionality-driven perspective-taking, which entails a reduction of potential meanings and thus a selection of how to understand events. Weick (1995) discusses the process by which selection takes place through an analogy to cues which are extracted and bracketed from the environment. Drawing on James (1950), Weick denotes that cues fill two main functions in sensemaking: First, they are representational in the sense that cues function by exemplification of that from which they are extracted. Second, cues are prospective as they, based on the representational function suggests actions and consequences of actions. As such, cues fuel inferences about the larger areas they represent. As highlighted by Eisenberg (2006), this view on how cues shape meaning has similarities with the Vygotskijian (1962) 'social mind' theory's notion of symbols as channels for meaning. As stated by Vygotsky (1962, p. 7):

*The world of experience must be greatly simplified and generalized before it can be translated into symbols. To become communicable it must be included in a certain category which, by tacit convention, human society regards as a unit.*

The quote emphasises how language and utterance (speech acts) do not simply entail the formulation of thoughts into words. Rather, the sense individuals make of the world is a process in which acting and relating are intertwined processes of reality construction, which forms our sense of events.

Following extraction, Figure 3 highlights retention driven by plausibility as central to the sensemaking process. The notion of retention by plausibility highlights that sensemaking at the bottom line is driven (hence the feedback loop in the figure) by pragmatics and reasonableness rather than notions of objective perceptive accuracy. The theoretical underpinning of the sensemaking perspective makes the concept of accuracy problematic, as the notion of accuracy presupposes access to an unfiltered present whilst the notion of sensemaking contends that perceptions are guided by retrospective selections of events. As such, plausibility takes the forefront at the cost of accuracy in everyday sensemaking. This point is put forth by Helms Mills, Thurlow, and Mills (2010, p. 189), stating that 'plausibility essentially refers to a sense that one particular meaning or explanation is more meaningful than others or that something feels right within the range of possible explanations available to sensemakers in a given situation'. In this line of thought, the emphasis on retention serves to highlight how knowledge based on plausibility emerges through a process driven by social interaction

(enactment), followed by retrospect content processing (extraction) in which aspects of a practice are categorised, stabilised, and created as meaningful and knowledgeable. In the schematic chain, retention thereby highlights how cues, through assessments of plausibility, take the form of knowledge. Through retention, previous sense made in a context feeds into and informs the formation of future sense in the form of knowledge; and, as such, previous meaning can be said to have *sense-giving* features for future sensemaking (cf. Corvellec & Risberg, 2007; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2007). Thereby, the sense created in a particular environment both constrains and makes possible future action.

The above presentation of sensemaking started in the connection between subject and flux. A point which, hitherto has been underemphasised in the description of sensemaking is the role of identity for this process. In Figure 3, identity is highlighted in the feedback loop to enactment. Weick (1995) highlights identity as a central property and driver for sensemaking, as notions of self and others entail reference points that guide reading of events and thus inform how meaning is constructed through reference to how such meaning reflects a subject's sense of self-consistency and being (Weick, 1995; Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). The view that is put forth has resemblances to Ybema et al.'s (2009 p. 300) conceptualisation of identity as emergent from an iterative 'permanent dialectic', wherein the self and social are intertwined. Identity is thus, from this perspective, not to be understood in givens (cf. the notion of personality) but as polyvalent. That is, identity is, from the sensemaking perspective, an on-going accomplishment as individual subjects are both constructed and construct. The first instance (the subject as a construction) takes place through our embeddedness in past meaning. Drawing on such meaning, individual identities are, from a sensemaking perspective, seen as relationally signified. This is a process of objectification (a temporally solidified reduction of meaning) that 'entifies' individuals. As such, the sensemaking perspective holds resemblances to conceptualisations of identity as constructed positions in social space (cf. the notion of subject positions, Hall, 1996). However, as a bulk of constructionist research on identity has indicated, the concept of identity cannot be viewed as fully top-down or discursively determined (Ainsworth & Grant, 2012; Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Coupland & Brown, 2012;). Rather, individuals also construct – a process that, from a sensemaking perspective, is viewed as manifested through on-going and action-driven meaning-making activities, spurred out of the subject's point of contact with its surroundings. Taken together, these processes result in the proposition that individuals, by necessity, are what Weick, referencing Mead (1934), denotes as the 'parliament of selves', which enacts certain identities in relation to our conceptions of the environment (i.e. understanding the environment based

on conceptions of self) but is also shaped by dispositions during contact with the environment (i.e. the environment informs our identity). Put differently, when defining an event, one is also relationally defined as a self, which perceives the event from a certain perspective, position, or outlook.

## **Sensemaking and organising**

How then can one understand the process of organising through the concept of sensemaking? As previously stated, process-based perspectives closely relates the concept of organisation to that of human social interaction. Organisation can thus, at baseline, be conceptualised as socially typified action patterns. In this line of thought, March and Simon (1993) define organisation as coordinated action among individuals with differing preferences, information, interest, and knowledge. Likewise, other scholars have, from a process perspective, emphasised organisation as patterns of actions shaped towards certain ends through attempts to institutionalise and generalise specific representations of meaning (cf. Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). With the notion that entities are relationally constructed abstractions by which we understand the social world, the concept of organisation becomes instrumental: organisations are socially constructed through joint efforts to stabilise and predict human behaviour. In this way, the concept of organisation is, in a literal sense, a form of 'world-making activity' (Chia, 2003) which is about the reduction of possible meanings through ordering and rationalisation. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005, p. 410) explains the relation of sensemaking and organising when stating that: 'The operative image of organisation is one in which organisation emerges through sensemaking, not one in which organisation precedes sensemaking or one in which sensemaking is produced by organisation'. Sensemaking is thus a precondition of organisation.

The point that organising is a social process that is anchored in the sensemakers' on-going enactments raises the question of how sensemaking and organising relate to the concept of organisational learning. The sensemaking perspective can in this regard be argued to bear many resemblances to theories of social, situated learning that emphasises *participation* (see Antonacopoulou & Chiva, 2007; Chiva & Alegre, 2005; Elkjaer, 2003) and draws on epistemologies of *practice* (Cook & Brown, 1999). Points of resemblance between these constructs are among others that sensemaking and constructionist learning theory, both situate meaning making in the realm of human interactions, with an emphasis on doings as the source for such relating (see, e.g. Gherardi, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Within research on organisational learning, frameworks of learning that view this process as participatory and action-driven have



developed substantially, both theoretically and empirically (Easterby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini, 2000; Karataş-Özkan & Murphy, 2010). However, drawing on Schwandt (2005), and Weick and Westley (1996) some important points of differences can also be identified. From this perspective, the relation between organising and learning is in some aspects obscured when viewed as complementary or as reinforcing social processes. In this light, learning and organising may instead be seen as oxymoronic; an integral part of the learning concept presupposes variation, expansion, development, innovation, and transformation (cf. Engeström, 1987; Illeris, 2003; Mezirow, 2000). In this line of thought, the social process of learning essentially houses and draws on disorganisation whilst organising presupposed abstraction, uncertainty reduction, and conformity.

Whilst a sensemaking framework depicts processes of pragmatic reduction of equivocality and – as such – serves to describe how perspective frameworks and outlooks on the world are constructed and stored, contemporary learning frameworks tend to put greater emphasis on how durable changes in such perspective frameworks and outlooks occur. As such, the relation between organising as a social process and learning as a social process holds both resemblances and differences. The process of organising is in the present thesis seen as anchored in a framework of sensemaking rather than learning. Furthermore, sensemaking and learning are conceptualised as separate processes, though they hold both resemblances and distinctions.

### ***The sociality of sensemaking and organising***

The basic field assumption (cf. Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) that both sensemaking and organising entail social endeavours has, until now, only been hinted at in the above presentation. However, the point that organising based on sensemaking is a social accomplishment calls for examination of how these processes are social. To explain this, organising can be described through different notions of subjectivity. In one, it is a process residing in the transition between an intersubjective dimension and a generic subjective dimension of the social world. As both an intersubjective and a generic subjective process, organising is a 'mixture of vivid, unique intersubjective understandings and understandings that can be picked up, perpetuated, and enlarged by people who did not participate in the original intersubjective construction' (Weick, 1995, p. 72). Intersubjectivity, as it is referred to in the quote, is a concept that, as highlighted by Biesta (1999), should not be understood as the exchange of pre-articulated thoughts emanating from individual minds but rather as an action-driven construction of joint meaning. As formulated by Dewey (cited in Biesta, 1995 p. 116), it is 'the

making of something in common'. But as mentioned in the quote by Weick above, organising also has a 'generic subjective' component reaching beyond the locally intersubjective constructions of meaning. A generic dimension of subjectivity corresponds to embedded vocabularies, frames, rules, and routines that encapsulate past experiences (Allard-Poesi, 2005; Bakken & Hernes, 2006). From a sensemaking perspective, these can be seen as previously extracted 'cues' that, through processes of retention, become knowledge and function in a coordinating manner for further action. The mixture of intersubjectivity and generic subjectivity serves to acknowledge that, whilst organisation is an on-going accomplishment, it is not a myopic accomplishment. To place organising in a dimension between intersubjectivity and generic subjectivity emphasises how organisations are characterised both by situational intersubjective relationships and generic constraints, which limits potential meaning in favour of stability. Organisation, viewed in this way, is thereby both produced and productive, as it in part builds on constitutive patterns, which in turn are constantly evolving and invoke, inform, and constrain the sense made of happenings in relation to the genealogy of the pattern.

### **Application in the thesis: Sensemaking and high-reliability organising**

Lastly, a few words can be said on the subject of capturing process in empirical research and how the sensemaking framework has guided the studies undertaken in the present thesis.

Sensemaking is, as highlighted, a perspective wherein the world is mainly created from 'within', as objects and orders are viewed as socially created through retrospectively enacted bracketed cues. However, with the notion of plausibility and feedback of past meaning into new meaning, sensemaking can also be studied as imposed from wider frames of reference. As a result of this, two possible temporal ways to conceptualise sensemaking are to either give emphasis to the *products of sensemaking*, in the sense of already constructed – and hence ascribed and entified – aspects of meaning, or study meaning construction *as it happens through enactment*. Whilst the latter approach brings with it an emphasis on the micro-social production of meaning, the previous perspective denotes the sensegiving features of established meaning systems as the object of study (cf. Corvellec & Risberg, 2007; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). As noted, the thesis research aims to analyse both these temporal aspects of the sensemaking process. In addition to this, the objective of the thesis also encircles organisational reliability as an object of study. As this concept has not yet been explored theoretically, a brief overview is offered below.

## ***High-reliability organising***

The concept of organisational reliability is rooted in high-reliability organisation (HRO) theory (Bourrier, 2011; Laporte & Consolini, 1991). In short, HROs are organisations that display very few errors and overall high performance for long periods whilst operating under very trying conditions. Although the HRO perspective gives the impression of an entitative viewpoint on organisations (for instance, formulations indicating the organisation as an actor with certain properties or qualities), organisational reliability can also be viewed as a capacity which may surface in and from sensemaking and organising as processes. In this line of thought, Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (1999); Weick & Sutcliffe (2007); and Bigley and Roberts (2001) locate the notion of organisational reliability as a capacity to 'continuously and effectively manage working conditions, even those that fluctuate widely and are extremely hazardous and unpredictable' (Bigley & Roberts, 2001, p. 1281). Thus, from a sensemaking perspective, examinations of organisational reliability target certain qualities of the organising process.

In this light, Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) define reliability in terms of 'mindful' organising, which in turn hinges on sensemaking abilities to *anticipate* and *contain* dynamic chains of events. Anticipation is, according to the authors, the ability to pick up cues from the environment in order to increase sensitivity in task execution and foresee courses of events. In turn, containment amounts to the ability to direct activities in times of high pressure after unexpected events have occurred. These abilities have in turn been observed to relate to shared values or components functioning as cues that guide organising as it happens. Weick and Sutcliffe identify three such properties that propel and support organisational anticipation: a preoccupation with failure, sensitivity to operations, and a reluctance to simplify interpretations. Likewise, an organisation's ability to contain and redirect on-going undesirable courses of events is supported by a *commitment to resilience* and *deference to expertise* (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

In the research undertaken in the present thesis, the focus on organisational reliability has served to elevate the analysis of SPU work practice from a purely descriptive level towards the questions of how certain qualities of sensemaking and organising processes may vouch for safety and resilience. With this background, the theoretical underpinnings of the research questions and the different part-studies of the thesis can be developed.

## ***The research questions viewed theoretically***

In the introductory chapter, the aim of the undertaken research was presented as an empirical examination into organising processes in the context of SPUs' work practice that is dedicated to confrontational police interventions. This objective was further stated to be pursued through two interrelated questions targeting different aspects of organising.

The first research question of the thesis' aim was formulated to enquire about ascribed meaning coupled to specialised police unit work practice. This focus of research gears the analysis towards the products of sensemaking in terms of examinations of how previously enacted meaning feeds into future sensemaking. Such analytical trajectory entails the study of contextually established knowledge and possible use of cues, which feeds forward and informs the construction of new knowledge in a given context. This way to analyse sensemaking emphasises the perspective frameworks that guide action. As stated by Jaffee (2001, p. 17):

*Human organisations place events and stimuli in a framework of that is commonly understood and widely shared in order to motivate and generate human action. A language, a sense of mission, objectives, and particular ways to achieve these objectives, are constructed and defined so that organisational members can make sense of what it is they do and explain what it is they have done.*

In the thesis, the first research question is mainly pursued through studies B and C. Study C specifically sets out to examine what Jaffee (2001) refers to as the frameworks of organisation, as it targets SPU members who ascribed meaning connected to 'elements of organisation'. In short, elements of organisation were, in Study C, operationalized to exploration of the sensegiving features of leadership, management, and ICT systems (conceptualised as sociomaterial dimensions of organisation). These dimensions of organisation were, in Study C, related to the concept of reliability. As such, the concept of reliability served to gear the analysis towards how virtues and values of safety were manifested in the social and material practice of an SPU. An important question of Study C was how elements of organisation, which are drawn upon by the organisation members, may support or hinder a reliable approach to the management of high-risk police interventions.

Furthermore, ascribed meaning is also explored in Study B, which entails an analysis of the meaning connected to SPU police officers' occupational identities. In this way, Study B examined occupational identity work relative

to symbolic representations of the NI, conceptualised as an SPU organisation.

The second research question of the thesis was formulated to enquire about enactments of reliable performance in high-risk police interventions. This gears the analysis towards the emergent and situated properties of sensemaking and organising. The concept of organisational reliability is in relation to Research Question 2, which studies police interventions through assessment of behaviours and action trajectories manifested in the 'doings' of incident management. Enactment is, in the present thesis, studied as a social endeavour, as it is examined mainly in Study D through an analysis of collaborative action patterns of practitioners during police incident management. This gears the analysis towards enquiry of how individuals merge different understandings and perspectives, creating shared meanings out of diverse experiences (Bakke & Bean, 2006; Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is, in relation to the second research question, examined during the process when a target group:

*...enacts equivocal raw talk, the talk is viewed retrospectively, sense is made of it, and this sense is then stored as knowledge in the retention process. The aim of each process has been to reduce equivocality and to get some idea of what has occurred. (Weick, 1979, p. 133-134).*

The challenges connoted an analysis of direct enactment differs somewhat from challenges associated with an analyses connected to ascribed meaning. To study sensemaking on site, the involved individuals' accounts of sense must guide the examination, and it is crucial that the analytical strategy is sensitive to plausible diversity in these accounts (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995).

Lastly, in order to ensure a contextual understanding of police intervention units as a phenomenon, Study A in the thesis functions as a context analysis that summarises previous scholarly knowledge of the studied setting. As such, Study A does not depart from a sensemaking framework. In Figure 4 below, the research questions and part-studies of the thesis are schematically visualised in relation to the theoretical framework of sensemaking. The different part-studies are plotted in relation to the sensemaking process depending on which part of this process is the focus of each study.

**Study C (Ascribed meaning) elements of an SPU organization**

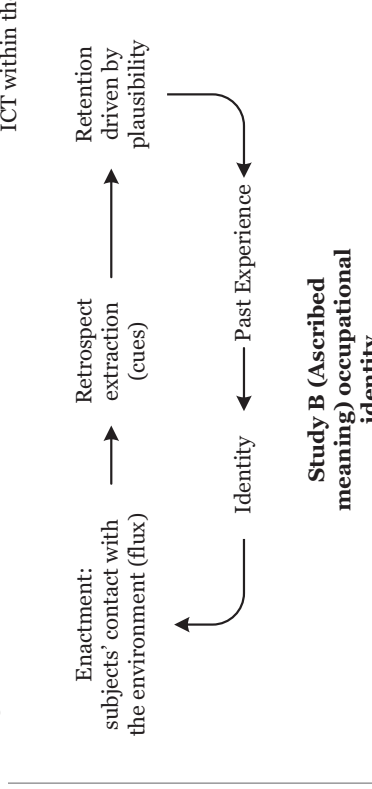
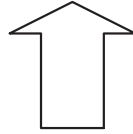
Examination of the sensegiving features of leadership, management and ICT within the NI

**Study D (Enactment) Situated sensemaking in incident management**

Examination of collaboration and reliability in situ during incident management

**Study A (Contextual) Research review paramilitary policing**

Examination of present scholarly knowledge on SPUs



Examination of occupational identity relative symbolic representations of the NI

**Figure 4.** The sensemaking framework outlined by the part-studies of the thesis. Part-studies are visually plotted based on whether they focus primarily on contextual understanding, enactment, or ascribed meaning.



# Method and material

The following chapter outlines the approach to empirical enquiry, which has guided decisions regarding empirical data collection during the research process. The selection of the thesis' foundational empirical material, as well as applied methods for data collections in the separate studies of the thesis, is developed. Furthermore, a reflection on the data collection is provided in which ethical aspects as well as encountered difficulties with the presented approach are discussed.

## Selection of empirical material

As mentioned, studies C and D of the thesis build on ideographic studies of organising within the empirical organisational context of the Swedish Police's National Counter-Terrorist Unit (NI). The NI also serves as an empirical example and unit of analysis in Study B, which highlights how organisations like the NI are surrounded by myths and strong symbolism, whilst Study A builds on previous research as empirical material serving to contextualise specialised police units and develop a vocabulary for the study of the policing conducted by such units. In the following, the argument's for choosing a mainly ideographic research design is developed.

### *An ideographic approach: Studying the NI*

The extensive focus on the NI is motivated by and dependent on both practical circumstances regarding the research project and opportunities offered by the empirical context to build knowledge on thesis research questions.

On a practical level, the NSS project provided a research context in which access to the NI could be granted through collaborating research partners. In this thesis project, the company Center for Leadership came to be of importance as a small and medium enterprise (SME) partner with previous experience working in collaboration with the NI. As such, the choice to study NI came to be a useful starting point for the thesis work. As put forth by Stake (1995), initial 'givens' like that presented above are not unusual within practice-oriented research projects. It is important to note, however, that a practical possibility to enquire into a specific empirical context does not comprise sufficient reason to conduct such examinations unless the unit of analysis also can be defined as purposeful (Patton, 2002). In this sense, the NI can be argued to constitute a central context for examinations of confrontational police interventions because it is an information-rich



organisational milieu in this regard. The basis of this line of argumentation is twofold:

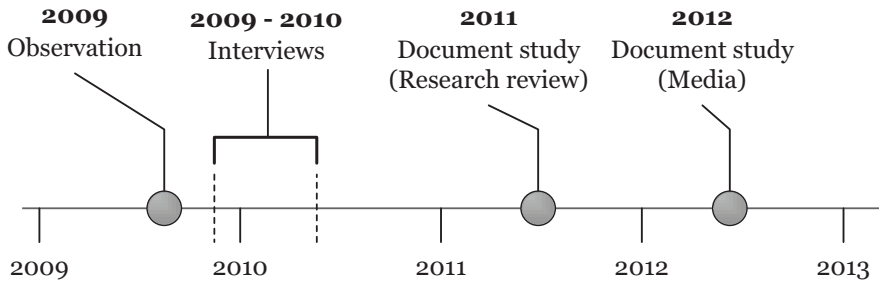
First, the NI provides an example of a highly specialised police organisation directed at the conduction of police interventions in complex and highly violent situations. The unit is, for example, the Swedish Police's main national resource devoted to operational counter-terror interventions and high-impact critical incidents. In this role of expert organ, resources are devoted to maintaining a highly competent staff within the unit's specific areas of specialisation. In addition to attracting and recruiting highly competent police officers, the NI can also be said to house accumulated experiential knowledge regarding police interventions. For instance, the unit conducted 483 interventions in the years 2006–2010, including hostage situations, diving missions, reconnaissance missions, no-knock house entries, personal security, etc. (National Police Board, 2004; 2008; 2011b). As Patton (2002) put forth, organisational contexts characterised by high levels of skills and competence provide rich opportunities for ideographical studies aimed at gaining first-hand knowledge and understanding of the organisation's primary activities (cf. the contrasting goal to gain average opinions about a phenomenon).

The second argument to why an ideographical approach devoted to studies of NI is purposeful is based on the fact that the organisation is an important institution within the Swedish police, and as such, knowledge-building in this context can be argued to have a potential for impact on practice. In addition to a role as a special repository for high-risk interventions, the NI is an institution for training and spreading knowledge about tactical concepts, policing methodologies, and technological developments relevant to large police interventions. As is the case with other specialised police units (cf. Kraska, 2007), the NI, in certain regards, functions as 'early adopters', as well as a workshop in which non-standard tactics, methodologies, and hardware for critical incidents are assessed and applied (Törnqvist, 2006). Therefore, the organisation has a prescriptive impact on how operational policing of critical incidents are conducted, and examinations in this context are likely to have an impact outside the immediate context. In the following, the range of methods applied to collect data from the targeted empirical setting is developed.

## **Methods for empirical enquiry**

With a mainly ideographical and inductive approach to empirical enquiry, several methods of data collection lay foundation for the studies within this thesis, as methods for enquiry were chosen based on issues that emerged

during the research process. Three main methods can be identified: interviews, observations, and document studies. Decisions, implementation, and rationale coupled with specific data collection techniques are developed in the following. Figure 4 shows a summarising timeline that indicates project progression and data collections.



**Figure 5.** Timeline indicating approximate periods for implementations of data collections.

### ***Observation***

As indicated by Figure 5, an observation study was conducted in 2009 during the NSS phase of the thesis project. The observation study provided the empirical foundation for Study D within the thesis. The observation targeted joint police incident management training in a setting in which police intervention was put to the test in a large-scale critical incident. The studied setting consisted of a full-scale simulated scenario in which an assault and following occupation and hostage standoff at a nuclear power plant was enacted using actors in the roles of perpetrators and hostages. The studied setting was suitable for analysis, as the exercise's magnitude was designed to test the ability of several reinforcing police intervention capacities (several local resources as well as Sweden's three SWAT teams and the NI) to jointly manage a system-threatening high-risk situation. Approaching incident management in a joint manner significantly increases the police's intervention capacity. However, it is also highly complex, as several specialised police units need to be simultaneously coordinated. From sensemaking and organisational reliability perspectives, high-strain situations like that described above offer a possibility to observe interaction patterns during incident management in a realistic setting. In regards to aim, the observation targeted teamwork and sensemaking through different collaborative interaction patterns among participants when working jointly on tasks and assignments (i.e. content processing) in the setting of a

command centre (see Study D for a more comprehensive description of the context). The observation lasted for nine hours – the duration of the exercise.

The studied setting contained some limitations on conducting observations. First, the observation faced access restrictions as a number of confidentiality and security restrictions within the studied setting had to be respected for the observer to obtain access clearance. The site only permitted one observer, and no audio or visual recording could be prepared, as the police were concerned that this would risk exposing the identities of practitioners who act incognito on assignments. As such, the observation registration relied on field notes instead of audio and visual recordings. The author conducted the observation in the role of *observer-as-participant*, meaning the observer is known to the participants of an observation but has minimal involvement in the social setting (see Gold, 1958; Einarsson & Hammar Chiriac, 2002).

An observation protocol (see Appendix I and II) was established to support the observation. The protocol was structured on time indications (when tasks arrived at the command centre), content (i.e. what input and tasks the command centre had to process), how content was prioritised, and observer reflections on agent interactions (i.e. how the command centre workers were perceived to regulate content in action or transition phases of interaction). The staff practised a routine to note events in an event log, which was updated continuously. This provided an opportunity to note in the observation protocol if an event was registered simultaneously by the command staff. When this occurred, subsequent cross-checking between observation protocol and the staff's own event log was conducted.

In addition to the observation protocol, a spatial map of the setting (see Appendix III) was sketched as a memory support. As discussed in depth in Study D, the confidentiality and access limitations to data collection during the observation caused a risk of observer distortion. To minimise these risks, the observation protocol proved to be of help. To complement the observations, short informal field interviews (10–15 minutes) were also conducted with participants during breaks and after the drill was finished, as a basic form of respondent validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that clarified ambiguities regarding interaction processes.

After conducting the observation, the field notes and all related material were transcribed. The qualitative data analysis (QDA) software Nvivo was used to analyse the observation transcripts (Welsh, 2002). In this phase, a coding protocol based on regulation of content and level of content (see

Appendix III) was used to categorise events in the command centre, wherein different collaborative interaction patterns had been observed. This approach to coding served to explain how the staff used different types of collaborative interaction patterns to make sense of different content, input, and tasks during work. Drawing on the coding protocol, coding was done in several steps. First, the transcriptions were assessed based on regulation of content (i.e. whether the staff showcased other regulation or social regulation in different events). After this step, an assessment was made of the level of content-processing dimension of teamwork (i.e. whether the staff engaged in complex problem solving or basic information sharing). Lastly, the Nvivo function of coding density provided an overview of the staff's preferences in regards to collaborative interaction patterns (i.e. based on coding density, the dimensions of high- and low-level content processing and other/shared regulation of content could be cross-checked).

## ***Interviews***

In addition to the brief informal interviews conducted during the observation study, a larger semi-structured interview study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) with employees within the NI was conducted during the NSS phase of the thesis project. The interview study provides the empirical foundation for studies B and C within the thesis.

Interviews were conducted in December 2009 and January 2010, with subsequent time in the spring of 2010 devoted to transcription. In total, 18 interviews were completed, which at the time of data collection amounted to approximately 40% of officers serving in operational duty within the unit.<sup>5</sup> The sample targeted the operative staff within the unit and, as such, the NI's administrative segments were excluded from the interview study. Among the operative staff, the study aimed to cover both the horizontal and vertical range of the unit's operative hierarchy. This meant representatives of all the unit's operative branches of specialisation (i.e. climbing and rappelling, vehicles and mobile tactics, breakthrough and explosive tactics, sniping, diving, and negotiation) as well as operators, group leaders, and intervention leaders within the unit were interviewed. Interviews were conducted on several separate occasions, and individuals who were on duty the days of data collections were asked about participation. Interviews were conducted

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the exact number of employees within the unit varies in different sources. It also seldom developed if the referenced number of employees includes administrative staff within the unit. Further, the notion of operational duty is problematic as individuals may move between different functions in task rotation. The number presented above is based on information that the NI has 60 employees (see National Police Board, 2011a, 2011b) and that approximately 15 of these employees' work in top management, administration, or educational functions.

face-to-face by the author at the NI headquarters in Stockholm and varied in length from 45 to 60 minutes. As for registration, all interviews were logged using a digital audio recorder and later transcribed verbatim by the author. In the transcription, idiosyncratic dimensions of speech were omitted (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005).

In regards to content, the interviews covered respondents' interpretations of operative work, which was organised into several separate themes (see Appendix V). The interview study focussed on employees' interpretations of the social and communicative structure of the work setting. In this regard, questions focussed on NI officers' understandings of how leadership, management, and technology impact operational police work. Additionally, the interviews targeted reflections on work identity and perceived, externally construed, images of the unit. It should be noted that, with a semi-structured approach, the interview guide served mainly to scaffold the content of the interviews. The chronology of questions and time devoted to the different themes of the interviews therefore varied depending on contingencies such as time, interest, and knowledge of interview subjects (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Analysis of interview transcripts was aided by the software Nvivo and focussed on emic analysis, in which sensitivity towards the perspectives of the participating practitioners is emphasised (cf. Boyle, 1994). The departure point of sensemaking theory provides that meaning is viewed as a creation of social interactions and communications (e.g. speech acts). The employed approach to data analysis of interview transcripts was, with this departure point, inspired by a Schützian (1967) phenomenological analytical categorisation of *first-order* understandings and *second-order* understandings. As Schütz (1967, p. 59) states:

*The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men [sic], living their daily life within their social world. Thus, the constructs of the social sciences are, so-to-speak, constructs of the second degree, that is, constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene.*

To construct second-order understandings, two main steps of coding guided the analysis. First, interview transcripts were coded using a technique of *in vivo coding*, where labels are assigned to data (Saldaña, 2013). Second, the aim has been to move towards theoretically infused second-order interpretations through *axial coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) wherein labels are related to each other.

## ***Document studies***

Complementing interviews and observation, two different types of document studies were conducted within the thesis project. First, an integrative review (Torraco, 2005) of previous social scientific research was conducted for Study A. The review contained empirical examination of 48 peer-reviewed journal articles about paramilitary policing and paramilitary police units (PPUs).

Second, document studies were also used as a method for data collection in Study B. In this study, a 'connected concept analysis' (cf. Lindgren, 2012) based on a body of 506 printed news media articles about the NI was conducted to provide foundation for an analysis of how symbolic representations of organisation informs situated work identity construction. Following Prior's (2003) classification of document studies, the documents are used in somewhat differing ways in studies A and B. In the research review, the focus was on analysis of the content of documents whilst the purpose of Study B was primarily to learn the effects of documents. The implications of these differing analytical methods are developed in detail below.

In the research review, focus lied primarily on the content of documents. As the research review posts the questions of how the emerging phenomenon of PPU's and paramilitary policing have been talked about and conceptualised in previous research, emphasis lies on examining and constructing taxonomic structures and forms of classification to produce a holistic vocabulary and a sense of topicality that surrounds the identified subject. The content within documents is, in this perspective, viewed as communicating thoughts, representations, and linkages among concepts in a specific field of research. In terms of procedure, the literature review targeted international peer-reviewed articles published within a 10-year span. As the subject of PPU's and paramilitary policing lacks a unified research agenda, searches of literature were wide, targeting the subject areas of sociology, policing, criminal justice, criminology, and auxiliary fields of research. Literature searches were, therefore, done within the databases SocIndex (SI) and Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) using a variety of subject terms and descriptors targeting specialised police tactical units. The analysis of documents entailed inductive thematisation and ideal type classification of research contributions, with the aim to construct an initial overview of how the selected topic had been approached.

Within the media text analysis, texts are seen differently. Here, the content of documents is not the only focus of analysis. Rather, the effects of

documents are studied, and media texts are – in this sense and to a greater extent – conceptualised as productive; i.e. 'doing things' with the subject of the texts. Thus, in Study B, the empirically examined text corpus is theorised as a materialised symbolic order that actively interposes (cf. Althusser, 2001) subject positions, drawn upon in processes of agent identification. In regards to procedure, the choice to sample news coverage was motivated by the centrality printed news publications have in representing what has been referred to as 'discursive articulations' (Sela-Shayovitz, 2011). In this case, the interest was in descriptions of the NI as an organisation, and data were drawn from Sweden's four biggest national daily newspapers: Aftonbladet (AB), Expressen (EXP), Dagens nyheter (DN), and Svenska dagbladet (SvD). Aftonbladet and Expressen are tabloids, and Dagens nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet are morning newspapers with 'broadsheet' characteristics. These newspapers are, in Sweden, considered the four major sources of printed daily news (Lindgren, 2008); and, as such, they can direct the focus of public debates. Data were drawn from a time span of December 1999 to February 2011. This time frame was chosen because the NI has functioned in its present role within the Swedish national police since 1999 (Flyghed, 2000b). Newspaper searches were conducted in the news-monitoring full text database Retriever using variations of the NI's name as descriptors. A connected concept analysis (CCA) of the text corpus was done to identify key elements and linkages among representations in the discourse surrounding the NI (see Lindgren, 2012). This type of analysis serves to combine qualitative and quantitative coding techniques in order to describe how a text corpus is symbolically represented and signified. CCA is conducted in several different steps. The analysis employed in the thesis applies atomisation, filtering, conceptualisation, connecting, and visualisation. Atomisation refers to a process wherein a large text corpus is quantitatively categorised based on frequently occurring semiotic units. These units are in the filtering step of analysis, reduced through techniques such as stop-word filtering and filtering based on the researcher's prerequisite knowledge about the study and subject at hand. After filtering, the analytic step of conceptualisation amounts to construction of categories out of semiotic units. This means revisiting the units in context and assigning labels to groups of units. After conceptualisation, the relations between signifying labels within a corpus are examined through co-occurrence analysis, connecting labels to each other. This step of analysis entails the application of quantitative bibliometric operations in order to see how relations between concepts are formed within a corpus. After connecting concepts, a relational map indicating frequencies and strengths of co-occurrence between different concepts in a corpus can be generated, and the differential structural and relational dimensions of text corpus can be viewed schematically.

## **Making sense of data**

With a variety of methods for data collection, the studies of the thesis employ differing analytical strategies, detailed in depth within respective study. In the following, some common denominators and guiding principles for data analysis are sketched out.

As indicated by the objective posted in the introductory section of the thesis, the present research aims to explore meaning through an understanding oriented research approach. The purpose of the separate studies as well as the studies taken together is to develop understandings of the targeted empirical setting through analysis of the meanings employed by involved practitioners. This acknowledgment implies that an overarching aim in the empirical explorations, which draws on the sensemaking framework, has been to capture idiosyncratic and intersubjectively created meanings formed from experience. As the subject of enquiry is meaning, the employed analytical tools thus strive to 'hover low over the data' (Allard-Poesi, 2005, p. 176) and allow for diversity and dynamic expressions of meaning to be considered.

### ***Quality criteria***

Following a processual ontology with an adjacent view on epistemology as pluralistic, interpretative, and contextualised, the possibilities to assess knowledge (and in this case the quality of data) by necessity deviates from the mainstream notions of validity and reliability. This does not imply that no assessment of quality of knowledge can be made, but rather points towards the conclusion that such inferences must be made based on alternate criterions. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994), notions of trustworthiness and authenticity have guided the empirical studies in the present thesis. From this point of view, trustworthiness serves to make assessments possible about: 1) how research findings and second-order interpretations are credible abstractions from first-order meaning; 2) in what degrees research findings can be transferred or expanded outside immediate studied practices; and 3) how methods relate to data collection and analysis and to what extent conclusions of conducted studies can be traced to empirical findings. In each study part of the thesis, different measures (e.g. member checks, thick descriptions) are taken to ensure trustworthiness.

The second criterion for quality amounts to that of authenticity. As the thesis project as a whole amounts to a developmental project aimed to both unbox and build upon scientific knowledge about the studied practice, but also to



support processes of reliable organising in the studied practice, notions of fairness and research as a catalyst for action, as developed by Guba and Lincoln (2005), are of particular importance. This last concept denotes how research should strive to raise awareness of the individual research participants, improve involved parties' experiences of the world, and also be enabling for further action. In the present thesis, measures taken to allow for these objectives include, among others, verbal communication of feedback on results to involved participants, and sharing of assessments of organisational processes with the organisation under study (cf. Rantatalo, 2011).

## **Research ethics**

The research undertaken within the present thesis follows and observes the research ethical principles for the humanities and social sciences as formulated by the Swedish Research Council (HSFR, 1996). Informed consent was obtained before respective data collection, based on detailed accounts of study goals and purpose of the data collections. In the observation study, information about the study was communicated both before the observation and at the beginning of the day of the observation. In the interviews, the same procedure was applied, with consent gathered beforehand (on a general level) as well as at the beginning of each specific interview.

Prior to receiving consent from the individual participants, permissions to study the NI were granted by top management of the unit. As can be noted in the thesis, confidentiality was guaranteed to the participants individually in order to safeguard autonomy and protect their identities. For instance, certain methods of data collection have been omitted (e.g. video recordings, photography) due to risks of revealing participants' identities. As the NI (as is the case with the police in general) often works under secrecy, the identities of specific participants were not at any time of the research revealed to the author. Rather, codenames were used in the interviews.

However, the identity of the organisation under study (the NI) is revealed in the present thesis. This decision interferes with confidentiality on place and location levels of research (Ryen, 2011). The decision to reveal the organisation under study was made because the NI is a unique organisation (there is only one such unit in Sweden) that holds rich potential to offer knowledge on the subject of organising for high-risk situations due to its exclusive institutional position within the Swedish police system. The study of sensemaking and organising in an SPU would not be possible to achieve if the organisational identity of the NI had been concealed because of the

contextual particularities that surround the NI's operative engagements. As the organisation's identity is revealed in the present project, a great effort has (as mentioned) been devoted to confidentiality on an individual level. Furthermore, the assessment was done so that the results of the conducted studies would not be sensitive or threatening towards the NI as an organisation.

In addition, the decision to reveal the NI has implied that an important facet of the project implementation has required careful planning of the studies involving dialogue with participants from the NI. In this process, certain methods of exploration and potential study parts were abandoned on the grounds of confidentiality or security risks, whilst others (i.e. studies B, C, and D) were implemented.



# Extended Summaries of Studies

The following chapter outlines the four studies in the thesis in terms of objectives, study designs, main findings, and contributions. Each study is presented under a separate heading. The order of presentation does not indicate the chronology of empirical examinations or publication dates. Rather, the aim in this chapter is to create a comprehensive narrative on the subject of SPUs and organising for critical incidents. For this reason, the chapter first introduces the context-oriented publication (A) in order to provide the reader with an understanding of how SPUs have been discussed in previous research. This then serves as a frame for the studies (B, C, and D), which draws on data from the NI as a sample organisation and enquires about occupational identity work relative to symbolic representations, reliable organising, and processes of sensemaking during police operational incident management.

## **Summary Study A – The miscellany of paramilitary policing: A literature review**

Rantatalo, O. (2012). The miscellany of militaristic policing. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 7(1), 51–65.

Study A presents an integrative literature review targeting research on the concepts of paramilitary policing and paramilitary police units (PPUs). These concepts were, in initial readings on specialised police units, frequently encountered and the cause of conducting the study was thereby to examine what previous social scientific research had been done on police intervention units, tactical teams and adjacent organisations. At the time the study was conducted, there was also a pending question regarding if and how the concepts of PPU and paramilitary policing could be put to use in relation to the thesis project. More specifically, the empirical research objectives that guided Study A's analysis aimed to: 1) get an overview of how paramilitary policing had been studied within social scientific research; 2) examine how PPU and paramilitary policing within this body of research had been and could be defined; and 3) examine in what empirical and institutional contexts PPU and paramilitary policing had been discussed and made use of as an analytical concepts.

During the initial reading in on the subject, it became apparent that research on PPU was scarce, and the few contributions that could be identified were interspersed within a variety of scholarly fields. As such, an initial conclusion of Study A was that organisationally or educationally (PIA)-oriented research

on SPUs is limited. Given that few research studies address SPUs at all, the research design of Study A had to build upon broad inclusion criteria during data collection.

Studies were retrieved from the databases of SocIndex (SI) and Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) using a variety of search words. Searches within these databases were further complemented with citation snowballing in order to find studies on the subject. Peer reviewed articles from a time span of 10 years (2001–2011) were included in the review, and the selection of articles allowed for different paradigmatic, methodological, theoretic, and empirical contributions to be examined. In total, 47 articles were reviewed with coverage mainly within the areas of policing, security, criminal justice, cultural studies, sociology, political science, and international studies.

In order to answer the first research question of Study A, which was aimed at an orientation and overview of research on PPU, a schematic overview indicating distribution of articles by year and subject of research was created. Table 3 indicates this distribution of subjects within research.

**Table 3.** Number of published peer reviewed research articles on the topic of PPUs by subject and year.

Subjects related to paramilitary policing	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010/ 2011	Total
Conceptualisation and description of police militarisation/demilitarisation	2		1	1		1	3	2	1	2	13
Case study/description of PPU/policing system	1	1		2		2	1	1	2	1	11
Border policing and militarisation	2		1				1			2	6
Internal/external security	1			1	1	1		1			5
Counter-terrorism				1	2		1		1		5
Police use of force	1	1	1								3
Police with military experience		1									1
Public order policing					1						1
Private policing							1				1
Gender										1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>47</b>

The schematic distribution of articles as presented in Table 3 was complemented by qualitative analysis of different perspectives on PPU within the defined text corpus.

Through basic qualitative and inductive categorisation, differing prominent perspectives and themes within the articles were coded under separate headings in order to examine how PPUs and paramilitary policing had been conceptualised within different tracks of research. The analysis revealed that PPUs tended to be described in one of two ways: 1) As law enforcement resembling military institutions (in training, structure, appearance, weaponry, etc.), or 2) as law enforcement in which a formal sense is merged with the military. These definitions are wide, as they cover a variety of police sub-organisations, ranging from SWAT teams, national guards, gendarmeries, coastal guards, counter-terrorist units and other organisations that resemble special police security forces. In the analysis, it further became apparent that the institutional and/or empirical contexts (i.e. if studies targeted colonial policing, counter-terror policing, western policing, etc.) of the reviewed studies extensively impacted how PPUs were conceptualised and what the conclusions regarding the deployment of PPUs signified. For instance, authors writing about militarised contexts or in relation to counter-terrorism denoted that the deployment of PPUs could serve as a viable *third force* option to the involvement of military resources in internal security matters.

In some of these contexts, the proliferation of police security forces were taken to evidence societal demilitarisation, democratisation, and minimisation of violence, as PPUs were seen as viable substitutions of military for internal security matters. In contrast, research on PPUs within democratised contexts regularly conceptualised this type of policing in terms of a militarisation of civil society, as an unfortunate blurring of military and law enforcement responsibilities, and as a trend towards increased use of punitive policing methods.

A similar demarcation between research tracks was that of theoretical orientations for the study of PPUs. Some of the reviewed studies approached the subject from what can be termed a functionalistic perspective, wherein the aims of research could be to classify types of policing in relation to each other, study how PPUs vouch for security, or study the concurrent or possible uses of PPUs within the frames of civil law enforcement. Other studies however applied an explicitly normative-critical perspective on militaristic policing in which PPUs were related to questions of police

legitimacy, police violence, democracy and governmental power. Based on these differences, the research review concluded that the

*...Ways to denote the subject of militaristic police(-ing) varies considerably depending on theoretical and empirical interests, as well as on research interests at different aggregated levels...(Rantatalo, 2012a p. 59).*

A conclusion was that no unified language, research programmes, or conceptual clearance could be identified regarding paramilitary/militaristic policing or PPU. In addition, few studies used first-hand collected data as foundations for analysis. As a way to further discussions on the subject, the review presented a suggestion on a systematic description of major perspectives and conceptualisations of PPUs. The framework was structured on a theoretical dimension (presenting different approaches to PPUs) and on an empirical dimension (presenting approaches to the study of PPUs). With these dimensions, main results of previous research could be categorised (see Figure 6).



		<b>Theoretical dimension</b>	
		<b>Descriptive/ Functional</b>	↔
<b>Empirical dimension</b>	<b>Para- military police 'is':</b>	Police-military mergence Police conjoined with military Military integrated with police 'Third forces' in between institutional spheres.	Police showcasing military artefacts and symbols (police with military weapons, training, language, atmosphere, traditions, philosophy, structures, strategy, command, organisation)
		Examples: CIMIC (civil – military co-operations), border patrol, coast guard.	Examples: PPU, tactical units, task forces, SWAT teams
	<b>Para- military policing 'does':</b>	Policing instead of military Policing on behalf of military Policing utilising military tactics Policing of counterterrorism	Aggressive policing Violent policing Brutal policing Undemocratic policing Repressive policing
	<b>Which results in:</b>	Demilitarisation Militarisation Blurring of spheres Ineffective policing	Militarisation Fear Mistrust Uneasy relationships between police and public.

**Figure 6.** Research approaches to paramilitary policing categorised by theoretical perspective and empirical focus

In conclusion, the findings of Study A indicated that police special units, such as tactical teams and counter-terrorist units, have been severely under-researched. Of the studies that do target this type of policing, many contributions consisted of theoretical or conceptual articles that discussed the effects of militaristic policing or activities of PPU on a general level. The lack of empirical examinations also means that the subject of confrontational specialised police work lacks a comprehensive nomenclature and that the concept of paramilitary policing lacked clarity, making it problematic in an analytical sense.

## **Summary Study B – Macho monsters and nice guys: Media representations and identity work in a specialised police tactical unit**

Rantatalo, O. (2013). *Macho monsters and nice guys – Media representations and identity work in a specialised police tactical unit*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Study B was conducted based on a notion that police tactical units seem to be organisations surrounded by a strong symbolism, popular cultural conceptions, and strong narratives at sites such as media and public debate. The starting question of Study B, therefore, became how such embeddedness in symbolic meaning is linked to tactical police officers' sensemaking of occupational identity. Previous research on this issue is somewhat inconclusive, as police officers' views on representations of policing on the one side has been argued to be consistently coloured by suspicion and criticism (cf. Palm & Skogersson, 2008; Reiner, 2010) whilst portrayal of policing also may serve in promotional ways for police officers socialisation into work (O'Sullivan, 2005). From a sensemaking perspective, identity is viewed as a product of subjects' contacts with external environments whilst comprehension of such environments also is shaped by the identity position a subject holds. As such, occupational identity can theoretically be seen as constructed in and through professional activity, whilst also being a facilitator for professional activity.

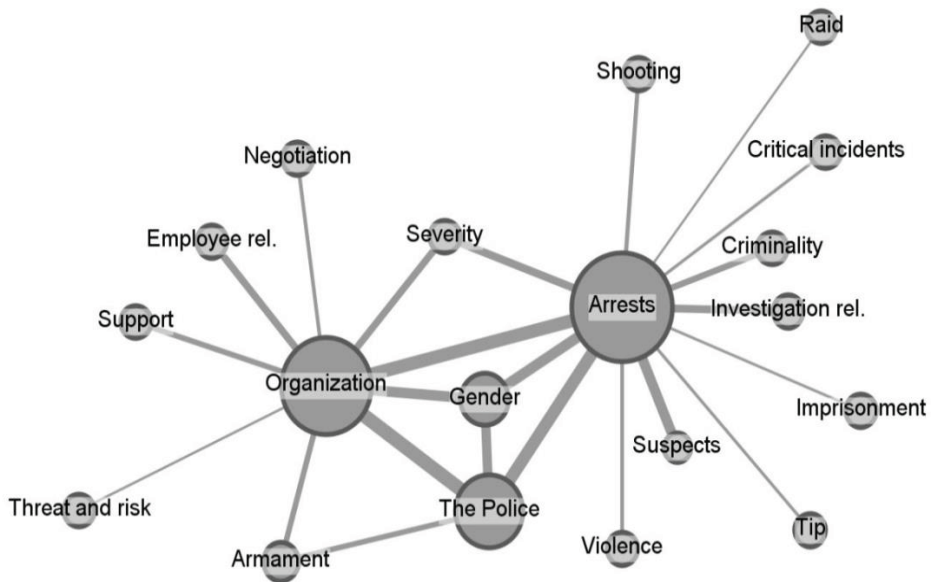
With this background, Study B theoretically employed the notion of 'identity work' (cf. Van Maanen, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) as a concept that describes how individuals actively acquire identities through social interaction embedded in meaning systems. Empirically, the study focussed on the construction of work identity within the context of the Swedish Police's National Counter-Terrorist Unit (NI).

In short, the specific aims of the study were to: 1) enquire how police tactical units (exemplified with a study of the NI) are symbolically positioned in contemporary society and 2) examine how representations signifying meaning were managed and worked upon through serving officers' narratives of occupational identity.

The article approached these questions through an analysis of 506 news texts mentioning the NI, drawn from Sweden's four largest newspapers, in combination with 18 interviews with serving officers within the unit. Media texts were categorised using connected concept analysis (Lindgren, 2012) in order to depict how pervading articulations (i.e. signifiers) of the NI co-

occurred in semiotic chains attributing meaning to the organisation. In contrast, interviews were aimed to target storylines and narratives of employees' conceptions of own work identity and strategies for work-related identification in relation to external representations of the NI.

In the findings, a symbolic network of signifiers attributing meaning to the NI as an organisation was depicted in overview (see Figure 7 below) and the defined key signifiers within this network were developed in detail in order to describe prominent themes and representations of the NI.



**Figure 7.** Network graph of news coverage referencing the NI.

*Note.* Nodes are reoccurring representations of the NI. Node size suggests centrality of a representation. Lines and line edge thicknesses suggest relations and relational strength between signifiers. Minor manual editing has been done in order to enhance the figure's readability.

In summary, the findings indicated that four key signifiers governed the network of symbolic articulations of the NI (arrests; organisation; the police; gender). In relation to the arrest node, the NI was regularly represented in frames of danger, violence, and action. In relation to the organisation, the NI's engagements were regularly articulated in terms of spectacularity. In relation to the police, the NI was partly depicted as police (i.e. the best of the

police, a weapon against crime) and partly as other than police (i.e. other than regular police, more violent than police). Lastly, in relation to gender, the text corpus represented the NI as a highly gendered organisation that is characterised by machismo.

In interviews, it was widely acknowledged that the NI existed within public consciousness and that the attention devoted to the NI had an impact on how employees defined their own work selves. Several identification strategies were apparent in the material ranging from tendency to over-identify with the public image of the NI, to positively infused enjoyment of representations, to dis-identification and active projection of counter-images of work selves.

In conclusion, Study B indicated that work identities coupled with the professional context of the studied police unit resonates, in different ways, with symbolic attributions of meaning and identity. Following Kjaergaard, Morsing, & Ravasi (2011), the study concluded that positive representations of the NI (such as representations depicting the NI as elite, a heroic organisation, a highly skilled organisation, and an intriguing organisation) had 'self-efficacy' effects on police officers definitions of occupational identity whilst negatively infused representations (such as portrayal of the NI as macho, unequal, paramilitary, unjust, or coercive) spurred identification through alternative local images of identity (e.g. virtues of normality). Both positive and negative representations, in this way, influenced productive sensemaking of occupational identity.

Drawing on Study B, it can be concluded that the NI in a Swedish context is tightly coupled to a set of narratives or modern myths that have an active impact on how employees make sense of their professional roles and thus define themselves in their professional practice.

### **Summary Study C – Sensemaking in the Swedish police's national counter-terrorist unit**

Rantatalo, O. (2012). Sensemaking in the Swedish National Police Counterterrorist Unit. In C. S. Taylor, D. J. Torpy, and D. K. Das (Eds.), *Policing global movement – Tourism, migration, human trafficking, and terrorism* (pp. 105–123). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Study C amounts to an interview study examining how policing and management of critical incidents are dependent on processes of sensemaking in the organisational setting of an SPU. In detail, the study discusses how sensemaking of organisational elements links with reliability in task

execution. As such, the study targets the frameworks of organisations that motivate and facilitate organised action during the engagements of an SPU. Study C has a close practice orientation with the dual aims to provide a close-up study of operative work practice within a police tactical unit and to conduct a reliability assessment of such an organisation.

Chronologically, Study C was the first empirical examination in the thesis project and, as the study title implies, it targets the NI as a sample organisation. Theoretically the study draws on sensemaking theory and high-reliability organisation theory (HRO/HRT, cf. Boin & Schulman, 2008; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007) as frameworks for analysis. The studied organisational setting was initially defined as a socio-material practice.

As an analytical lens and operationalization of what to focus on empirically within this practice, Study C conceptualised sensemaking in relation to procedural (e.g. membership allocation systems and management structure), interpersonal (e.g. leadership, organisational relations) and technological (e.g. communication technology systems, blue force tracking systems) aspects of the specific organisation. These organisational frameworks were conceptualised as elements of an organisation that would channel past experience of SPU work and future sensemaking in the management of high-risk police interventions.

The choice to examine sensemaking in relation to leadership, management, and technology was based on previous research highlighting how pre-existing organisational structures and systems have sensegiving features, affecting future sensemaking (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011). Thus, Study C examined how employees within the NI drew on the organisations procedural, social and technological infrastructure in processes of sensemaking and based on the results assessed how sensemaking of pre-existing organisational resources influenced reliability in operative police incident command practice.

In the results, unit members' conceptions of leadership, management, and ICT use were presented. In regards to management, the findings indicated a number of organisational heuristics and principles (such as level-specific command, chains of command, and directive control) supported sensemaking in operational work practice as these principles of management were promoted as keys to increasing predictability and understanding of other individuals' actions in high-pressure situations. Principles of management were further described in terms of a collective operative philosophy, which was described as experientially acquired and developed

collectively over time. Shared knowledge about heuristics was shown to support reliability as it facilitates a coherent approach to safety.

In regards to leadership, a pervading ethos among employees was the perspective that leadership should be decoupled from formal positions. In regards of what leadership is, it was formulated in terms of a collective understanding about social aspects of human organising. In the context of confrontational police interventions, unit members highlighted that micro-management was to be avoided and that 'sensegiving' in terms of goals, directions, and allowance of autonomy were desirable strategies of leadership, as they facilitate organisational flexibility. The ability to enact the desired type of leadership was by unit members described as dependent on and supported by the organisations' homogeneity. As a result of homogeneity, individuals within the unit thought in the same way and shared a common language and outlook on the social world. This homogeneity was concluded to be somewhat of a double-edged sword: on the one hand, previous research indicates that shared conceptions and outlooks ensure common ground and coherence in organisational processes; whilst, on the other hand, tight relationships between organisational members has been concluded to not support doubt and error detection in operations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

Lastly, the role of technology in operative engagements was described, by unit members, as a medium for the construction of situational awareness and as a means to spread information between different operative segments during interventions. In regards to information spread, problems such as information overload and the spread of unprocessed information was highlighted as potential jeopardies for sensemaking in relation to technology use. On a meta-level of communication, respondents also reflected on how interface and design of communicative systems (specifically, 'blue force tracking' systems) scaffold and frame how something could be done, as interface design promoted certain approaches to usage that could cause tensions when applied in unintended ways. From a reliability perspective, this was identified as a potential problem, as the design of the technological system promoted hierarchical detail steering that was concluded to stand in opposition to the expressed virtue of flexibility during interventions.

From a reliability perspective, a general tendency in the findings indicated that the NI is an organisation with a *modus operandi* of flexibility. Management and leadership could, based on the findings, be concluded to be generally aligned and supportive of this virtue, whilst ICT aids were expressed to cause tensions in relation to the virtue of flexibility as the systems design presupposed detail steering in accordance to traditional command and control principles.

## **Summary Study D – A framework for team-level reliability through a lens of collaboration**

Rantatalo, O. (2012). A framework for team-level reliability through a lens of collaboration. *International Journal of Emergency Management*, 8(3), 264–279.

Study D examines operational police critical incident management on a team level by examination of collaboration patterns between practitioners during operational training. As with Study C, Study D has a close practice approach in that it is an organisationally relevant assessment of resilient organising in the studied work practice whilst, at the same time, it aims to provide scholarly knowledge on the particularities of organising in and for critical incidents.

The study applies observation as a method, and the empirical setting of the study was in a field operative command centre during a large-scale scenario based simulation of a terrorist spawned hostage situation. As such, Study D entails an observation study of a work-based educational context, namely that of realistic scenario training.

The setting was designed to train joint interventions of SPU resources. In large-scale police operations, different intervention units such as SWAT teams and counter-terrorist units use a joint approach to command. This increases the police's capacity numerically; however, it also puts a strain on the intervention as several units have to be coordinated simultaneously. Previous research has suggested that collaboration in these situations is complex but desirable, as it expands attention spans and increases organisational awareness of involved practitioners. However, the notion that more collaboration equals better incident management can also be questioned as collaboration can be said to contain different types of interaction patterns that lead to different results. Drawing on these conclusions, Study D aimed to: 1) enquire in what ways collaboration can support reliability and 2) explore the possibility of using analysis of collaborative patterns as a framework for team-level reliability assessment.

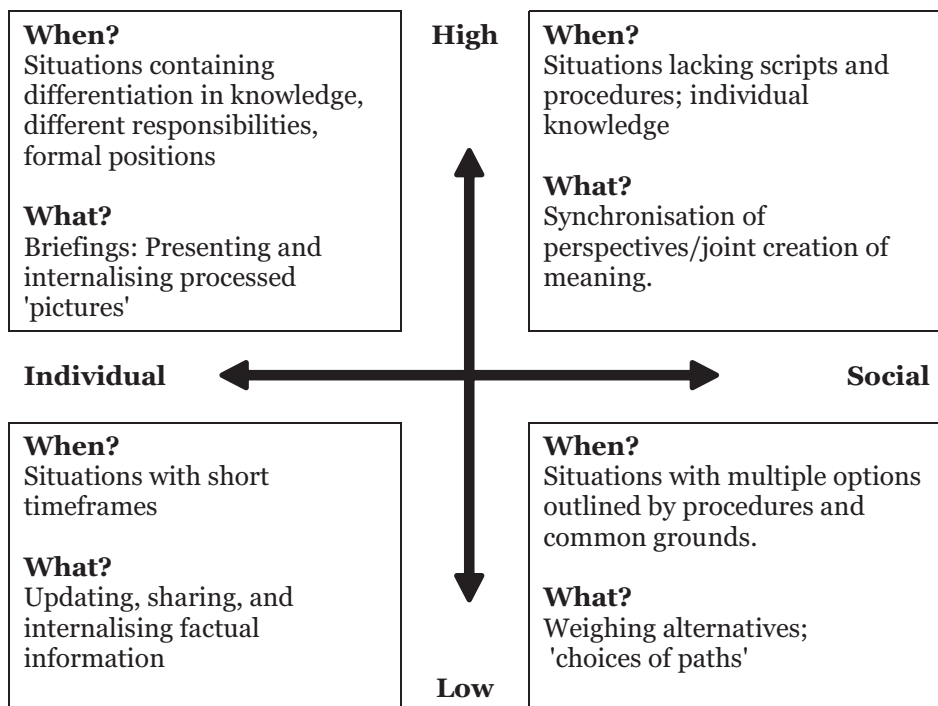
Theoretically, collaboration was conceptualised using Volet et al.'s (2009) framework for collaborative learning. According to Volet et al., collaboration can be defined as co-construction of knowledge within a group as content is jointly processed. This processing can be divided into a regulatory dimension and a level dimension. Regulation is a measure for how content is coordinated and framed either by multiple contributors (social regulation) or by individuals (individual regulation). Likewise, level of content processing

refers to how deep the cognitive processing within a group is. High-level content processing in this sense involves construction of joint meaning and understanding through elaborations, enquiry, and negotiation, whilst low-level content processing refers to basic types of information-sharing, primarily not directed at transformation of involved individuals' mental representations. Drawing on this framework, Study D conceptualised collaboration as an array of intersubjective interaction patterns rather than as a coherent unified social process. With a polyvalent definition of collaboration as a starting point, Study D reviewed previous research on team-level reliability in order to reach a prescriptive framework for reliability assessment through analysis of collaborative interaction patterns. Based on readings of previous research, the following prescriptive principles were formulated: 1) previous research suggests that the principle collaboration pattern connected to reliable teams is a high-level/co-regulative approach to problem solving and 2) previous studies on team-level reliability also indicated that teams need to be able to showcase 'collaborative elasticity' (Fenema, 2005 p. 135), which equals to variance in collaborative approaches to problem solving. Specifically, approaches other than high-level/co-regulation were shown to be effective in: a) temporal team action phases with low task complexity; b) during containment of unexpected events when time frames are short; and c) in situations characterised by uneven levels of knowledge between group members. These findings indicated that broad-based enactment of safety is a social endeavour that is dependent on a capacity to engage in different types of intersubjective processes.

Study D, empirically tested these principles for reliable organising through an assessment based on the previously mentioned observation study. In this study, collaborative patterns showcased during task-solving in the command centre were analysed based on frequency (i.e. targeting practitioners' favoured pattern of collaboration) and variance (i.e. targeting situational conditions surrounding the different patterns of collaboration). In regards to frequency, the command staff concluded that showcasing high-level/individual regulation was the preferred pattern of collaboration. High-level/co-regulation was, in contrast, used as a last resort when no other options were available. By analysis of variance, the distribution of different collaborative patterns could be applied to different types of situations (see Figure 8).

As the figure indicates, low-level content processing patterns were showcased in situations characterised by familiarity, common ground, low complexity, or short time frames.





**Figure 8.** Variance of situations in which different collaborative patterns were observed.

In regards to situations in which high-level content processing was evidenced, these could be concluded to amount to complex situations. As mentioned, the staff tended to lean against individual regulation of content when facing complex situations. This tendency could, through analysis of variance, be explained by the command centre's functional differentiation with clear role structures, which promoted individual regulation of content, as it tied practitioners to varying areas of responsibility. This tendency, on the one hand, promoted action orientation in the command team. However, from a reliability perspective, such formal differentiation of responsibilities also has the implication that action orientation comes at the cost of situational awareness.

In conclusion, Study D offers conceptual development of a prescriptive framework for assessment of team-level reliability. Using the framework, a team-level reliability assessment was conducted through observations of collaborative patterns in a command centre staff during the social enactment of incident management.

# Discussion

This concluding chapter aims to explicate the thesis' main contribution to current knowledge on organising and sensemaking in the empirical context of specialised policing. The discussion is structured around the thesis' aim and the objectives of the undertaken part-studies. As mentioned in the introductory section of the thesis, the thesis aim was operationalized through two research questions, viz.: (1) what *ascribed meanings* are coupled to specialised police unit work practice, and (2) how can SPU *organising be enacted reliably*.

Taken together, these questions serve to advance knowledge and create fuller understandings of the professional practice of SPU policing. The chapter's disposition, as follows, is to revisit and elaborate on conclusions on both research questions, one after the other, and then to amalgamate and synthesise the main conclusions and contributions of the thesis as a whole. Finally, the chapter ends in a reflection on the present project's research limitations by discussing the applied research approach and the theoretical framework employed. Having discussed conclusions, contributions, and limitations, the chapter is concluded with a brief elaboration on potential prospects for future research.

## Enquiring about ascribed meaning

As mentioned in this thesis' introductory section, the first research question is aimed at examining the attributions of meaning and the present understandings that surround the empirical context of SPUs. As such, the first research question is exploratory – or, in other words, it is formulative (Kothari, 2004) – as it aims to gain familiarity and new insights regarding SPUs and SPU work practice as contemporary societal phenomena.

From a sensemaking, theoretical point of view, the endeavour of researching ascribed meaning amounts to examining first-order vocabularies and frameworks that subjects within the studied setting use to make sense of phenomena. In this line of thought, research that targets ascribed meaning thus aims at creating second-order constructs that explore the frames and foundations of meaning-making in a particular context. It has been argued, however, that gaining an understanding of ascribed meaning in a particular context requires that reasoning must be understood in relation to 'the structure and coherence of the larger contexts in which specific meaning are created' (Bruner, 1990, p. 64). The concept of ascribed meaning, then, as applied in the present thesis, has two dimensions: one amounts to

exploration of the meanings ascribed to SPU work practice by persons working within this context, whilst the other amounts to an attempt to contextualise these accounts by studying SPUs as a contemporary societal phenomenon.

In the research this thesis project has undertaken, examinations targeting the first aspect of ascribed meaning (i.e. the endeavour of constructing second-order constructs of first-order construct) provides opportunities to unbox SPUs as a part of contemporary policing and thereby offers possibilities to look into the processes of sensemaking and organising that lays a foundation for SPUs' management of high-risk situations. Meanwhile, to reach a comprehensive understanding of SPU organising, this dimension of ascribed meaning is in need of contextualisation as SPUs can be argued to be largely unexplored as organisations and policing bodies. Consequently, SPUs as an area of study is in need of concepts, frameworks and nomenclatures that can contextualise both the meanings ascribed by individuals within the context and the enactment of organisation within the targeted setting.

A contextual description of SPUs is, in the present thesis, pursued mainly through analysis of prior research (Rantatalo, 2012a) and popular representations of police intervention units (Rantatalo, 2013). A research review was conducted in Study A that examined the conceptual heading of 'paramilitary' policing by mapping, in terms of content and context, how it has previously been discussed. The tendency to describe specialised coercive policing in terms of paramilitary appearance is, as the review indicates, the presently prevailing approach to conceptualise the doings of specialised police units. Through examination of how SPUs have been articulated in previous research, Study A aims to forward discussions and provide an empirically anchored ground for alternate ways to understand SPUs as contemporary phenomena. The study suggests that paramilitary policing is an ambiguous concept which holds a variety of connotations, for it has been used from a variety of theoretical perspectives (ranging from critical emancipatory to functional) and in a multitude of institutional contexts (such as colonial policing models, liberal western policing models, two-tiered gendarmerie policing models, and military models of policing). The article concludes that the present way to conceptualise specialised confrontational policing is, from an analytical perspective, indistinct and, therefore, also problematic.

Spring boarding the results of study A, Chapter 2 of the thesis aims to re-conceptualise how specialised policing can be understood as a specific type of policing which is conducted by a variety of police units. Chapter 2 aims,

then, to provide a refined vocabulary for discussions about SPUs. The model and typology suggested in Chapter 2 draw partly on the same logic as previous research on paramilitary policing: that this type of policing is highly coercive and violent. The suggested model, however, demarcates military violence from police violence with reference to the police mandate. The model also takes power into account as a differentiating factor when classifying different types of specialised policing units. Here, the notions of high and low policing are used as analytical grids.

Taken together, Study A and Chapter 2 in the thesis kappa provide a typology of specialised policing bodies designated to intervene in high-risk situations. This typology is not to be understood as a 'final vocabulary' (Rorty, 2008), but rather as a suggestion on how to elevate and forward discussions on specialised policing from a focus on face-value resemblance to military towards a perspective in which different types of specialised policing can be differentiated on the basis of mandates and proximity to central seats of power. With a refined typology of SPUs as a basis, a number of particularities surrounding specialised police unit work practice can be understood and 'made sensible'. Examples drawn from Chapter 2 are why operational counter-terrorism seems to deviate from normal-procedure policing in its methodologies, technologies, and management. Further, the model presented in the thesis takes into account why operational counter-terrorism is accommodated with expanded operational space in relation to other types of SPUS and how these factors establish specialised policing as exceptional in relation to normal-procedure policing. Regarding knowledge claims, the typology as presented here amounts to an attempt to construct a coherent contextual vocabulary for SPUs that can be used as a frame of reference for the studies of SPU work practice.

Whilst SPUs in study A and chapter 2 of the thesis mainly is examined using scholarly research, a contextual understanding of SPUs is within the thesis also pursued through examinations of ascribed meaning in the sense of representations of specialised policing (Study B; cf. Rantatalo, 2013). In this aspect, symbolic media representations of the NI have been analysed through media news texts. In previous research, organisational imageries has been shown to function in a sense-giving manner, affecting how organisational members make sense of certain articulated identities and subject positions (c.f. Chouliararki & Morsing, 2010). In this way, representations of organisation have been argued to serve as input for self-reflection and channel constructions of professional identity (Kjaergaard, Morsing, & Ravasi, 2011). When we narrow the subject to the area of policing, mediated images of police and policing have been concluded to be a key resource for defining public discourse on the roles of police and law

enforcement in contemporary society (Mawby, 2010; Leishman & Mason, 2003; and Reiner, 2010). In extension, the relation between policing and mediated images of policing has been shown to influence police institutions' own understandings of their purposes and practices (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1989; Manning, 1997). One example highlighting this influence is Lawrence (2000), who argues that news about what problems police confront, and the social construction of police responses to these problems, are constructs that reinforce each other. Another example highlighting the connection is Lovell (2003), who describes processes of cultural reflexivity wherein media representations of policing are theorised both as reactions to policing practice and as guidance for it. In this sense, media constructs of policing and mediated symbols that connote the police are closely intertwined with police practice in reinforcing relations of meaning.

Adding to this body of knowledge, the media analysis provided in Study B explores a discourse of 'sensationalism' surrounding SPUs, in which narratives of action, elitism, masculinity, and violence have been prevalent. The impact of such ascribed meaning is, in turn, studied through SPU police officers' narratives of identification and their professional selves. Linkages between symbolic articulation and self-narration is shown to manifest either through strategies of acceptance – that is, constructing oneself as exceptional, 'elite' police – or through projections of counter-images that denote an ethos of normality and equality. Adding to the conclusions that specialised policing is exceptional, Study B thus indicates that this type of policing is represented as sensational, and that such representations feed back into police officers' 'meta-perceptions' of themselves (Tuohy & Wrennall, 1995). Regarding the questions of sensemaking and organising, these findings explicate how an awareness of being within a locus of attention – within the 'gaze' of another – affects processes of identity construction and also, to an extent, how certain behaviours and conducts are deemed acceptable, ideal or on the contrary, undesirable within the work context. In this sense, Study B dovetails with research indicating that media has an educative role as it is a site in which meaning and connoted subject positions are encoded and given content (Assarsson & Aarsand, 2011).

In conclusion, the main findings from Study B highlight how symbolism and mediated representations of organisation inform NI employees' narrative constructions of occupational identity. Following Gordon, Clegg, & Kornberger (2009), Study B thus sets out to '[enquire] into the link between institutionalised myths and situated practices' (p. 76). As the article puts forth, several intersections between representations and types of 'identity work' are manifest in SPU employees' storylines of identity. As noted in the present thesis' theoretical chapter, identity construction is from a

sensemaking perspective viewed as reciprocally interrelated with on-going sensemaking, as individual persons' efforts to make sense of events are informed by accounts of meaning that is previously ascribed and therefore sensible, and as such accounts of meaning are in turn shaped and carried through notions of self. In the present research project, the ambition to gain understanding of specialised police work practice raises questions about what meanings are attributed to these types of organisations, both in the form representations and in practitioners' on-going identity work.

Finally, ascribed meaning is also central in Study C (Rantatalo, 2012b), since this study entails an analysis of NI employees' first-order constructs of leadership, management, and technological support systems in the organisational context of the NI. These concepts are in the study conceptualised as socio-material frameworks of organisation that hold sensegiving features and so affect sensemaking and organising processes on an interpersonal level. Study C thus puts the searchlight on how such arrangements as role systems, communication channels, and material technological subsystems within an organisation are intertwined in processes of everyday sensemaking. An aim of Study C is to ask how the sensegiving features of the above-mentioned organisational arrangements have served to support organisational resilience and reliability. As such, the contributions of Study C will be discussed at greater length in relation to the second research question of the thesis: How sensemaking and organising may support reliable performance in high-risk situations.

### **Examining organising in relation to reliability**

As mentioned, research question 2 in the thesis aims to advance knowledge on the subjects of sensemaking and organising in relation to reliable performance in high-risk police interventions. In relation to Research Question 1, this objective is oriented towards exploration of the situated, emergent, and on-going properties of organising. Thus, Research Question 2, is pursued through ideographical studies geared toward advancing both scholarly knowledge and support of organisational practice, aiming as it does to examine and assess certain qualities of the social processes of sensemaking and organising within an SPU.

Within the thesis, the question of reliability is most visible in studies C and D (Rantatalo 2012b, 2012c). These studies were conducted within the frame of the NSS project, and they target organisational reliability from somewhat different perspectives. Whilst Study C focuses upon how leadership, management, and ICT systems function in a sensegiving manner for police

officers in operational duty, Study D examines how meaning is constructed between subjects whilst interventions are enacted in situ.

In relation to previous research on sensemaking, Study C highlights how material and social arrangements within work practices affect practical achievements and actions within such practices. Even as objects are literally enacted into existence, such enactments are retained and stored in the form of knowledge, which in turn influences future sensemaking (c.f Jaffee, 2001). Study C entails an assessment of organisational reliability through analysis of first-order constructions of leadership, management, and ICT. Drawing on officers' accounts of 'what the story is' in concrete police interventions, the study provides knowledge of how organisational reliability depends on holistic configurations of organisation.

From a reliability perspective, the findings of Study C indicate that the NI is an organisation whose *modus operandi* favours flexibility. This conclusion comports with inferences put forth by Clark et al. (2000) that success in policing of critical incidents is less about force and hinges, rather, on access to a variety of tactical options. Adding to this conclusion, Study C highlights how important it is, as a paramount feature of reliability, to properly align organisational, social, and technological frameworks of organisation. For instance, the study concluded that management and leadership arrangements in the studied setting were aligned to support of a virtue of flexibility, whilst ICT aids that the unit employed in relation to such virtues caused tensions as the design of the ICT system supported detail-steering in accordance with traditional command-and-control principles. In sum, Study C indicates that organisational *holistic coherence* is important to consider for achieving reliable performance. Different sub-systems of organisation may, by themselves, make sense and be beneficial, but still prove incompatible with each other. As an assessment of reliability within the NI, Study C indicates how the organisation can build reliability by acknowledging the importance of alignment of organisational sub-systems.

In addition to this conclusion regarding the development of reliability, Study D within the thesis also enquires into resilient organisation on a micro-intersubjective level during task execution in an incident management context. Whilst previous HRO research recognises that reliability is a social endeavour based on enactment, the research literature has somewhat underemphasised micro- and close-practice perspectives on the emergence of reliability (cf. Barton & Sutcliffe, 2009). On this basis, Study D conceptualises reliability in relation to manifestations of collaborative action. Whilst a dominant conceptualisation of collaboration within incident management research has depicted this as a largely one-dimensional process

surrounded by a favourable rhetoric (for a discussion, see Berlin & Carlström, 2008, 2011), a rich stream of educational research provides fine-grained conceptualisations of collaboration, depicting it as a multifaceted process with different manifestations (c.f. Volet et al, 2009). A usual way, in this type of research, to approach the subject of collaboration is to conceptualise how different types of collaboration support learning and task-solving (Summers & Volet, 2010; Volet, Summers, & Thurman, 2009). Drawing on these insights, Study D asks whether different types of collaborative interaction patterns likewise can be said to support or enhance resilient performance. This question was in Study D explored through an analysis of previous research on collaboration, high-reliability theory, and team performance research combined with an empirical assessment of incident command practice. Through this analysis, Study D conceptually develops a tentative team-level reliability assessment framework that is, applied empirically in a simulated but naturalistic context that involves incident command training.

The conclusions of Study D follow those of Study C: an important factor in reliability is flexibility. In terms of interpersonal relations, this flexibility is showcased by a capacity to adjust responsive behaviours according to situational variables, such as available time frames, common ground, and complexity in task execution. Thus Article D provides knowledge that aims to be organisationally relevant by providing an assessment model, whilst also being theoretically significant as it provides knowledge on the enactment of reliability on a team level.

## **Notes on the contribution**

Building on the discussion above, this paragraph aims to summarise the overall contribution the thesis makes to knowledge development within the targeted fields of research. To focus on the contribution entails, in certain respects, dealing with what Howe & Eisenhart (1990) call the 'so what?' question of social scientific research (or, alternatively, 'if you are wrong about this, who will notice?'; cf. Campbell, 1986, quoted in Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 376). These questions are relevant, because the thesis sets out to be understanding-oriented, aimed at supporting practice and targeting a previously unexplored subject.

Using the notion of sensemaking, the concept of 'sense' will in the following be employed as a way to self-reflectively approach the 'so what' questions posted above. From this perspective, the present research project's contribution can be discussed in terms of how and whether the thesis



manages to answer the question 'what's the story here?' as applied in a context of police interventions.

This question will be addressed, by revisiting the vignettes in the thesis' introductory section. These vignettes depict two instances of the work practice of specialised police units, with both unifying and differing components. Both situations, namely an on-going robbery and an emotionally expressive hostage situation, were in the thesis introduction described as reactive, high-strain, dynamic, and highly consequential. The situations differ, however, in time frames, containment possibilities, and mobility. Departing from the thesis' conclusions, the question 'what's the story here?' can, when applied to the vignettes, be understood from a variety of angles:

One way to make sense of the depicted police interventions is through a lens of police and policing within the frames of civil society. In this dimension, the findings of the thesis suggest that the vignettes depict an exceptional type of specialised policing that is guided by a mandate to use high levels of coercive force, and is moreover institutionalised in close proximity to societal power. From this perspective, the vignettes do not, however – whatever the eye may suggest – depict a military technocratic use of violence, since the coercive measures undertaken are not indiscriminate, and those subjected to force, however violent the situation, are required to be accounted for as citizens. This perspective prohibits one from dismissing the different tactical approaches depicted in the vignettes as brute force. Rather, this perspective underlines the importance of considering variables such as safety, security and mandate as important facets of decision-making in highly violent police interventions.

Another way to understand the vignettes is through a lens of representation. From this perspective, the situations can be described as manifestations of a not only exceptional, but also highly sensational, type of organisational activity that has a variety of connotations from contemporary narratives. One such is, as exemplified in the thesis, the image of a violent, masculine, non-human, macho organisation. Alternatively, the vignettes are – with other references – exemplifying the activities of highly trained, highly skilled, elite police units safeguarding societal peace. Both these narratives, as well as other contemporary stories, can with the results of the thesis be argued to intertwine and inform both the general publics' view on police interventions and the espoused work identities of the officers conducting the interventions.

Yet another way to approach the vignettes is to look through a lens of organisation and reliability. From this perspective, the different tactical approaches employed in the situations can be unboxed. They can be seen as the material result of sensemaking, interpersonal organising, and collaborative assessments of options, which in turn builds on previously established organisational heuristics and support systems. From this perspective, the decisions to establish negotiation or, as in the case with the robbery, to meet violence with violence depend in part on such factors as previous intelligence, situational information, command and control principles, and leadership, which allows assessments to be made about proper action trajectories. The available tactical options will also be the material result of interpersonal relations and collaborative efforts undertaken in an incident command centre as well as out in the field.

The above-presented perspectives are different but interlinked. Taken together, they shed light on police interventions as a multifarious practice that can be understood as a nexus of context, events, identities, and actions, which in whole constitutes a 'meaningful relational totality' (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011, p. 342). Based on this line of thought, a fifth holistically aligned way to understand the vignettes can be suggested. This last perspective is the sum of the parts presented above, and thus constitutes a pluralistic answer to what the story of police interventions amounts to. This conclusion rests on the notion that organising as well as reliable organising seems to emanate and materialise through entangled heterogeneous registers; and, therefore, that a comprehensive understanding of police interventions as organisational practice needs to take into consideration a multitude of perspectives. The present thesis has suggested four such registers, entailing studies on the levels of *context* (studied through previous research and symbolic representations of policing); *occupational identity* (studied through narrative accounts of self and others); *first-order constructions of organisation* (studied through SPU unit members' own categorisations of social and material organisational frameworks); and *enactment during task execution* (studied through analysis of collaborative action patterns in the midst of task execution). To the extent that police interventions are a multifaceted nexus, it can be argued that it must be understood through a logic of collage. The construction of such collages is dependent, however, on the use of sensitising concepts and analytical trajectories, highlighting some aspects of the world and, in doing so, missing others. This is also the case with the present research project. Some limitations and prospect for future research can thus be circumscribed.

## **Limitations and prospects for future research**

As indicated above, questions of reliable organising and sensemaking can be pursued on various aggregated levels, and in relation to various aspects of organisation. As with any selection of what to direct attention to, a wealth of other possible observations is excluded and blind spots result. In addition to such constraints, the present research project has empirically followed one particular specialised police unit. In such an endeavour, some limitations also emerge in the practical context of research, restricting for reasons of confidentiality and access what subjects can actually be pursued.

To begin with the latter, the present project enquires into policing, and – above that – an area of policing that in large part has hitherto been restricted to research. As argued in Chapter 2, the 'high-policing' status of operational counter-terrorism means that this area of policing is surrounded by secrecy because of security concerns. In the present thesis, this secrecy had the consequence that organisation could not be studied at the scene during actual confrontational interventions. It has also meant that such methodological strategies as shadowing or prolonged ethnographic participation were impossible to conduct. Rather, as indicated in articles C and D, the question of organisation has been targeted through observations confined to realistic-scenario training and interviews with unit members.

Restrictions have also been apparent for such methods as reading organisational material in cases in which reports, statements, and formal decisions have been security-classified and therefore are not accessible for surveying. The strategy employed to work around these and similar limitations has within the project been to establish transparent contact with organisational representatives, mainly at the beginning of the project, when the preliminary aims and designs of the thesis part-studies were discussed in terms of feasibility regarding classified parts of the organisation.

In addition to these practical limitations, some analytical limits and prospects for future studies can also be highlighted. In the present thesis project, an underemphasised aspect of SPU work practice is the structural composition of the employees associated with this context. In this aspect, the present thesis only briefly addresses the tactical police officers' biographies and the gender composition within the studied unit. This is an area that can be suggested for further studies, since findings in for example Study B and Study C suggest that the studied organisational practice is characterised by homogeneity and homosociality, and that these notions affect the operational undertakings of the unit. How such impact is structured and what consequences this has, however, are questions that are not fully

developed within the frames of the present research project; as such, they may be an area for future studies of resilient organising.

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Oscar Rantatalo



## **Appendix I. Observation procedure**

Fältanteckningsprotokoll kommer användas som ett stöd i hur observationerna struktureras. Fältanteckningsprotokollet är utformat för att följa de individer som interagerar i staben samt kunna komplettera beskrivningarna med egna reflektioner.

Den procedur som är planerad att tillämpas startar i en skissering av det fysiska rummet och de funktioner som inryms i det.

De interagerande individernas funktion märks med nummer vilka sedan blir vägledande för observationsanteckningarna. Om flera personer uttalar sig samtidigt eller det är ohörbart noteras X-X samt X

Tidsangivelser markerar när olika ämnen avhandlas, vid nytt fokus/ämne anges tidsangivelse.

Noteringarna av det som sker görs så ordagrant det är möjligt.

Som komplement till detta finns utrymme för reflektioner över det uttalade i högermarginal.

Vid omfallstagningar/avsteg från rutin noteras episod samt tidsangivelse. (E+tid)

Vid explicit tal om någon av faktorerna noteras detta



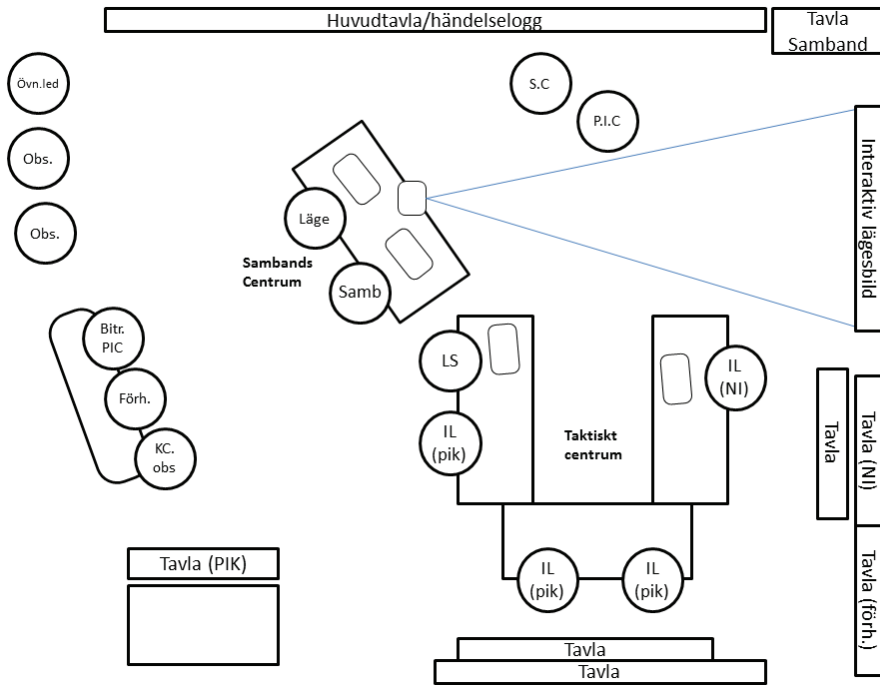
## Appendix II. Field note protocol for observations

Tid	Stabslogg ja/nej	Prio	Händelse	Beslut	Under rätt -else	Reflektion





## Appendix III. Spatial overview of the command centre



Funktioner/Stabspositioner – numrerade samt plats i det fysiska rummet.  
 Resursloggar, händelseloggar, lägesbild utmärkta.



# Appendix IV. Coding protocol for observation transcriptions

Protocol draws on Summers & Volet (2010) and Volet, Summers, & Thurman (2009).

## Other regulation (high/low)

- single-speaker episodes (minor contributions from others):
  - momentarily unequal situations
  - confidence in one's understanding of the task segment
  - instructive role
  - guidance of others' understandings

## Co-regulation (high/low)

- multiple participator episodes:
  - several verbal contributions
  - dialogic interaction
  - sharing understandings
  - monitoring of joint activity

## High-level content-processing episodes (co/other)

- Engagement with content characterised by:
  - elaborations
  - interpretations
  - reasoning
  - linking conceptualisations
  - explaining in one's own words
  - seeking understanding

## Low-level content-processing episodes (co/other)

- Engagement with content characterised by:
  - clarifications
  - verbatim recitation
  - seeking details
  - briefing
  - updating
  - sharing/internalising factual information



# Appendix V. Interview guide

## 1. Briefing och registrering innan intervju

Information om vem jag är, om anonymitet och användande av materialet samt: Datum, Tid, Plats, Kodnyckel.

## 2. Allmänna frågor (kontextuell förståelse)

- Vad jobbar du med här på NI?
- Hur ser en vanlig arbetsdag/vecka ut på NI?
  - (Operatör Insatsledare Gruppchef nivå?)
- Hur skulle du beskriva din uppgift vid insatser?
  - Hur kom du in på det du gör?
  - Hur länge har du arbetat på NI?

## 3. Insatser/insatstaktik

- Vad för olika insatser är du delaktig i?
- Var befinner du dig i insatser som ni genomför?
- Vad skulle du säga skiljer ert sätt att göra saker mot hur andra poliser jobbar?  
(-Konfrontativa taktiker? -Egensnickrade koncept?)
- Hur lär ni er olika taktiker?
- Är du själv delaktig i att diskutera hur ni gör saker? -Om så hur?/Om inte varför?
- Hur jobbar ni med återkoppling/ debriefing?

## 4. Ledarskap

- Hur skulle du beskriva ledarskapet i NI?
  - Det nära ledarskapet?
  - Det övergripande?
  - Hur jobbar ni med ledarskap i din grupp?
  - När är ledarskapet viktigt? Exemplifiera
  - Hur märker du av ledarskap ditt jobb i insatserna?
  - Funkar den träning för ledarskap bra i insatserna?
    - Finns några 'krockar'?

## 5. Ledningssystem (blue force tracking)

- Hur skulle du beskriva det teknikstöd ni arbetar med i insatser?
  - Hur lär man sig stödet?
  - Hur jobbar ni i gruppen med BFT?
  - Vad är dina upplevelser av att jobba med systemet? Bra dåligt?
    - Problem?

- Hur ser systemets utformning ut i relation till organisationen vid insatser?
- Vad betyder tekniken för ledarskapet?

### **(teknik insatsledare)**

- hur hjälper tekniken dig som insatsledare?
  - Din grupp?
- Vad för information behöver man som IL vid en insats?
  - Svarar systemet mot detta?
- Är systemet anpassat till er ert sätt att göra insatser?
  - anpassar ni er till systemet?
- Vad ger tekniken för möjligheter?

### **(teknik operatör)**

- Som operatör, hur upplever du användandet?
  - För egen del?
  - I grupp?
- Har man koll på systemet i sin helhet?
  - Saknar du något teknikstöd i din roll i insatser?

## **6. Om bilden av NI**

- Hur upplever du att NI porträtteras utifrån?
- Hur uppfattas ni? Exemplifiera
  - Stämmer det med verkligheten?
- Hur upplever du relationen NI/vanlig polis?

## **7. Avslut**

- Tillägg
- Mer info om studien, projektet, hantering av materialet osv (om så önskas)
- Kontaktinformation till mig.



**Department of Education**  
Umeå University, SE-901 87 Umeå  
[www.pedag.umu.se](http://www.pedag.umu.se)

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