



Organizational Changes and their Presumptive Effect on the Military Families

RESEARCH ARTICLE

AIDA ALVINIUS

SOFIA NILSSON

CAMILLA SJÖLÉN

GERRY LARSSON

SCANDINAVIAN
MILITARY STUDIES

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of work-life balance in a recent relocation decision made by the Swedish Armed Forces. Applying the “What is the problem represented to be?” (WPR) discourse analysis method to documents concerning budget submissions over a five-year period (2020–2024) and a relocation decision from 2017, this study identifies a common focus on the reduction of organizational vulnerability. The way the problem of organizational vulnerability is presented, however, neglects considerations of employees’ work-life balance and serves to make effects of organizational changes at the individual level invisible. Founded on a social constructivist perspective, the study therefore argues that this neglect of work-life balance in official discourse on organizational change may be counterproductive to the proposed aim of a reduction in organizational vulnerability.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Aida Alvinus

Swedish Defence University,
Sweden

aida.alvinus@fhs.se

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INTRODUCTION

The Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) impose unique requirements and terms of employment on its employees. The requirements include undertaking foreign service and staffing positions in a variety of units and staffs, often located all over the country. Working hours can vary from regular office hours to more intensive periods of exercise activities and deployments, both national and international, involving long absences from families (Heiselberg, 2017). Overall, this places high levels of demand on adaptation and flexibility at the individual level. Employees' families must also expect to adapt to organizational changes, which is not always easy or frictionless. Characterized by complexity and uncertainty, organizational changes are thus closely interconnected with external requirements (Dessler, 1976). Complexity indicates that the external environment is rapidly changing due to technological advancements, necessitating a high degree of adaptability (Emery & Trist, 1965; Rosa, 2013). To illustrate, the Swedish military organization is affected by the tense security situation in Europe following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022. The rearmament of the military organization, the discussion concerning NATO membership, and the need to adapt to the current security situation force the military leadership to make swift decisions, to enhance the organization's capabilities, to demand increased financial resources, and to carry out geographical reorganizations. These organizational changes affect every member of the organization, in general, and the families of the members in particular, requiring a more comprehensive adjustment than can be inferred from the various decisions being made.

How, then, are the needs of the organization and those of military families to be balanced? This article aims to explore the role played by work-life balance in budget submissions and a decision to relocate made by the Swedish Armed Forces.

The article is structured as follows. First, necessary background information is given about the particularities of the organization of the Swedish Armed Forces. We begin by discussing organizational changes within the Swedish Armed Forces by introducing four theoretical concepts: *organizational anorexia*, *destructive growth*, *organizational narcissism* and *organizational greed*. This is followed by a summary of research on military families and work-life balance. After this, the study's empirical material and methods are presented – the theoretical discourse analysis approach “What is the problem represented to be?” (WPR), introduced by Carol Bacchi (2009). The results follow; here we present the analysis of budgetary documents from the period 2020–2024, as well as a decision made by the military leadership in 2017. Both the budgetary documents and the decision were selected as they are presumed to directly impact organizational members and indirectly affect their families. The article concludes with a discussion of the results.

Overall, the article takes a comprehensive approach by combining theoretical concepts, policy analysis methodology, and empirical evidence to provide a case-based examination of organizational changes within the Swedish Armed Forces and their impact on work-life balance for military members and their families. It is argued that managing vulnerability from a one-sided economic incentives perspective and neglecting work-life balance in official discourse on organizational change may potentially threaten the actual presumptions – that relocation will reduce vulnerability, personnel scarcity, and ultimately bring economic gain – inherent in the initial decision.

BACKGROUND

FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONS RELATED TO THE SWEDISH ARMED FORCES

To understand how the particular organizational dynamics of the Swedish Armed Forces affect work-life balance, the article draws on four key concepts: organizational greed, organizational narcissism, organizational anorexia, and destructive growth (post-scarcity). “Organizational greed” refers to constant demands for availability, high performance levels, and loyalty from employees; “organizational narcissism” describes the denial and rationalization of negative information and an overestimation of one's own strength and importance; “organizational anorexia” and “destructive growth” refer, respectively, to significant organizational downsizing, and an inimical influx of economic, personnel, and material resources.

For context, since the 1990s the Swedish Armed Forces, as many other Western military organizations, has been affected by uncertainties and complications such as cutbacks (Bergström et al., 2014). The end of the Cold War meant a change in the security policy situation that created room for major reductions in resources and a refocusing of military defense. This came to be called “the anorexic organization” (Alvinus et al., 2020). Many military institutions saw a dismantling in their personnel and material leading to an imbalance between tasks and resources, with employees forced to carry out more tasks with fewer resources in shorter periods of time (Alvinus et al., 2020).

A reduction in employee numbers in the Swedish Armed Forces saw many individuals switch to civilian jobs, which has affected organizational social support (Bergström et al., 2014). A decrease in social support can have repercussions on the work-life balance of organizational members, resulting in increased work-related stress, additional task responsibilities, and a constrained amount of time available to fulfill assigned work duties (Alvinus et al., 2020). The Swedish Armed Forces have focused on reorganization rather than support, which is a common situation. This is the condition of organizational narcissism (Ohlsson, 2020). In organizational contexts, narcissism is characterized by an overestimation of one’s own significance. But in this case, where a reduction of resources threatens the organization’s survival, narcissism is a form of response to this organizational change. The organization’s focus on self-preservation results in an overemphasis on narcissistic characteristics, subsequently leading to a disregard for the well-being of the organization’s members. Individuals are expected to uphold the organizational self-image, demonstrate loyalty and pride, and acquiesce to decisions made by decision-makers.

These dynamics are changing, however, due to a deteriorating security situation beyond Sweden’s borders, characterized by instability and increased threats to the Western world (Swedish Government, 2015). This uncertainty led to political decisions that guided the development of military defense for the period 2021–2025 towards the construction of a more robust war organization. In addition, new staff must be recruited and re-recruited in order to maintain national security and the survival of military organization in the long term (Österberg, 2018). These new organizational conditions came to be called “destructive growth” or “post-scarcity” (Alvinus et al., 2018). Even if resources are added to the organization through political decisions, the organization does not have time to grow at a sensible pace. Stress and increased workloads are experienced, also, when more resources are allocated to the organization. The lifespan of the organization is affected in a positive way, while individuals become more vulnerable and exchangeable (Alvinus et al., 2018).

Greed in organizational contexts is about an imbalance between giving and taking between the employee and the organization. Coser (1974) describes how individuals balance individual freedom and organizational demands. He argues that certain organizations and institutions make total claims on their members by demanding exclusive and undivided loyalty. These organizations become “greedy” as they seem to consume the individual’s freedom. Military organizations are overwhelmingly the greediest, as they also require members to be willing to risk life and limb for the organization if necessary. This implies loyalty to the organization until death and, in this regard, also puts their families at risk of loss and grief.

Membership of a greedy organization easily creates a conflict between family life and work life. This is particularly evident when an individual has loyalty to two greedy institutions – employment by the Swedish Armed Forces and having a family, for example (Vuga & Juvan, 2013). The member of two greedy institutions feels the need to make multiple personal and emotional sacrifices to balance family life with the demands of work. This becomes tricky as the roles of family life and work life tend to interchange, with work offering more and more stimulation while the home is increasingly experienced as a demanding place with too little time for family chores. This imbalance can ultimately lead to impaired health and well-being, stress, and burnout (Hochschild, 1997). Therefore, in the upcoming section, we aim to present research on how military families and work-life balance are taken into consideration in the discourse on organizational change in Sweden in budget submissions between 2020 and 2024.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF MILITARY FAMILIES AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Research on military families typically focuses on understanding the unique challenges and experiences faced by those connected to military personnel. Studies in this field explore topics

such as deployment and separation, communication and support networks, adjustment and coping strategies, and the effects of military life on children and spouses (Anderson & Goldenberg, 2019; Huffman et al., 2008; Huffman et al., 2014). Researchers have, for example, investigated the psychological, emotional, and social dynamics within military families, as well as the factors that contribute to resilience and successful adaptation (Kees et al., 2015; Padden et al., 2011; Ohlsson, 2021). Work-life balance in the military is an important aspect of well-being for service members and their families. It refers to the ability to effectively manage and reconcile the demands of military duties with personal and family life responsibilities (Kasearu et al., 2020; Oskarsson et al., 2021).

Much of this research focuses on the soldiers and military families themselves. For example, Oskarsson and her colleagues (2021) have examined the perspectives of recently recruited officers regarding their perceptions of work-life balance and the potential impact on their future careers. They found that the officers grappled with the intricate task of balancing multiple loyalties, seeking strategies that would foster both personal and organizational success, while also harboring concerns about their future trajectory. Their ability to navigate these complexities and to find effective coping mechanisms played a crucial role in their overall well-being and professional growth. Formulärets överkant.

Furthermore, a number of international studies show the consequences that military families have to endure, mainly wives, husbands, and partners at home (Gustavsen, 2016; Gustavsen, 2017; Kees et al., 2015; Padden et al., 2011; Sayers 2011; Verdelli et al., 2011). One of the consequences demonstrated in the Swedish context is that veterans are more likely to divorce and less likely to re-marry (Pethrus et al., 2019). In addition, there is always an increased risk of injury or death in armed conflict and a distinctly masculine environment that may exert an impact on family socialization (De Angelis, et al., 2018; Segal, 1986). Military families must maintain relationships including vital events such as entering into marriage, undergoing pregnancy and giving birth to children. These may occur at the same time as the organization demands geographical relocation to another unit or service abroad. This can conflict with family life and lead to stress (De Angelis et al., 2018; Padden et al., 2011).

According to previous research on the Slovenian Armed Forces and the family (Vuga & Juvan, 2013), the demands of work require time taken away from the family more than family requires time taken from work. Further, previous research shows that work commitments limit effective participation at home. Hochschild (1997) found a reversal in the dynamics of home and work: work now provided stimulation, guidance, and a sense of belonging; home had become a space with an overwhelming amount to do in too little time.

This article contributes to this ongoing research of military families with a discourse analytical perspective of organizational change from the perspective of the government. We thus present a review of the literature on various types of organizational characteristics and challenges, forming a framework to better understand the context within which decisions are made. Furthermore, we have conducted a review of the literature on military families and work-life balance, aiming to contribute new insights into the mutual influence of these different perspectives when combined. Decisions made in the context of the organizational conditions mentioned above also impact numerous individuals, subsequently influencing their families. When organizational decisions affect individuals differently than they envision, additional challenges are introduced where questions of individual organizational loyalty may be at risk. Not every member of an organization chooses to accept every decision; they may seek alternative positions outside their own organization, exacerbating the already unfavorable conditions.

This study seeks to contribute by integrating the organizational perspective with family situations and work-life balance in this context, analyzing both the case of a decision regarding the relocation of defense branch staffs in the Swedish military organization and five yearly budget submissions from the Swedish Armed Forces (Budget Submissions 2020, 2021 2022, 2023, 2024) in order to see what role work-life balance plays in them. This decision and these budget submissions, and the decision in particular, were chosen, because they directly affected 300 employees (and indirectly, we may presume, their families) at various organizational management levels – an important case for study and critical review.

In order to be able to fulfil the study's aim concerning the role that work-life balance plays in the Swedish Forces' relocation decision and their budgets submissions 2020–2024, the use of a discourse analysis was regarded as suitable, in which Carol Bacchi's "What is the problem

represented to be?” method (WPR) was applied to the documents studied (Bacchi, 2009). The study is exploratory, as no similar studies have been conducted on this type of decision apart from a study foregrounding decisions from a gender perspective (Linehagen, 2022). This study is relevant not only for the Swedish Armed Forces but for Scandinavian countries and other Western nations, which experienced organizational transformation marked by significant resource reductions during the post-Cold War era of the 1980s and 1990s.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN AND THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study is a qualitative textual analysis employing an analytical framework developed within Foucault’s post-constructivist paradigm through the “What is the problem represented to be?” (WPR) theory and method set out by Bacchi (2009). This method focuses on analyzing and understanding how problems and issues are constructed and represented through organizational and political policies. The problems identified in this study are where conflicts between organizational needs and private-life preferences are disclosed. By analyzing documents, one can uncover which perspectives, interests, and values are highlighted or neglected, and the effects these may have on different groups and societies. According to Bacchi, it is important to study decisions, policies and documents produced by authorities and decision-makers; this is where the power to decide how the problem should be defined, what is taken for granted, and how the problem should be solved, resides. The idea of this method is to highlight *the unspoken*, which can affect individuals and organizations favorably and unfavorably alike.

The study assumes that there exist social constructions with the power to influence discourse and governance within an organization. This influence arises from the production of knowledge about what is deemed important, leading to assumptions being unquestioningly accepted and translated into action. Therefore, in line with the WPR approach, the study acknowledges that policies do not merely solve problems; they also generate new ones (Bacchi, 2009). Rather than adopting a problem-solving perspective, the study embraces a problematizing perspective. By focusing on the problem at hand, this perspective facilitates the exploration of what shapes the representation of the problem.

By starting from the WPR method, the study could be carried out using an inductive approach with deductive elements in order to be able to interpret what has been left unproblematized. The basic method is to select a policy or a decision and to apply the question battery developed by Bacchi (2009, p. xii). The six original questions are:

1. What’s the “problem” represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
2. What presuppositions and assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”?
3. How has this representation of the “problem” come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the “problem”?
6. How/where is this representation of the “problem” produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

Four of the total of six questions were selected. The first question aims to distinguish the problem, and the assumptions/presuppositions that form the basis of the problem presentation, and is used to explain the underlying causes of the problem in the decision. The basic premise of the question is the fact that there are invisible patterns and norms in organizations that tend to create the interpretive framework of the problem the organization has identified as needing to be solved.

The second research question illuminates what constitutes the underlying problem and what must be solved through the decision, creating the opportunity to discuss different interpretations of the problem’s presentation. These can help to provide different perspectives on the underlying causes that would otherwise risk being left unproblematized (Bacchi, 2009).

The third and fourth questions concern the study of the problem presentation through the effects achieved by the decision and the solutions presented. These questions highlight the

potential consequences that may affect the individual and the organization (Bacchi, 2009). The method is employed with the aim of studying the problem presentation through the effects achieved by the decision and the solutions presented. The question highlights the potential consequences that may affect the individual and the organization.

The questions “How did this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?” and “How has this representation of the ‘problem’ been defended, questioned and replaced?” were excluded, as the answers to these were regarded to be partially included in the other four questions selected. According to Bacchi (2009), the questions are interrelated and, consequently, the researcher should determine which should be foregrounded. While it is not essential to address every question, it is useful to keep the full set of questions in mind in the course of analysis (Bacchi, 1999).

The study is thus guided by Bacchi’s questions, while empirical illustrations have been analyzed with the support of previous research; objective, open-minded analysis was conducted with the aim of discovering new patterns. For Bacchi (2009), in a process of change, decision documents created in an organization are based on, and reinforce, already existing notions and norms as long as aspects of what has been left unproblematized are not highlighted. This serves to exclude alternative solutions to possible problems. The method is based on “backward” analysis of the empirical data: we start, that is, from the decision and the “solution” to the problem, and define what was unspoken in the problem and the assumptions generated in the decision itself.

EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

Decision on relocation (2017)

The Swedish Armed Forces have made various decisions regarding relocations and reorganizations. One specific decision has been chosen for study due to similar lines of reasoning found in other types of decisions (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017, *Leadership, command and control for stronger defense, FM2016-10870:28*). The purpose of this decision was to initiate a change in structure so as to be able to meet an armed attack, and to contribute to developments towards a total defense (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017). It should be also mentioned that for security reasons we cannot analyze all relocation decisions, and have thus chosen one.

Budget submissions (2020–2024)

The Swedish Armed Forces operates as a publicly funded entity, with its annual budget being determined by the Swedish Parliament. The government, specifically the Ministry of Defense, plays a key role in defining the scope of the Armed Forces’ activities by establishing tasks and objectives. These directives also serve as the foundation for procuring equipment and resources from other governmental bodies and external suppliers (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023). Each year, the Swedish Armed Forces submit a budget proposal to the government. In this proposal, the Armed Forces outline their perspective on the activities to be carried out in the upcoming years and provide an estimation of the associated costs. This budget submission serves as a means for the Armed Forces to communicate their intended operations and financial requirements to the government (SAF, 2023). Five budget submissions were selected out of the entire set of budget proposals for the period 2020–2024. These specific submissions were chosen because they reflect the Swedish Armed Forces’ ongoing transformation towards increased growth. All the budgets consist of a summary document of approximately five to seven pages in length, accompanied by a set of appendices comprising several hundred pages of supporting materials for the budget proposal. Budget submissions directly or indirectly impact all employees. They can directly affect their working conditions and resources, and indirectly influence organizational operations and decisions that subsequently affect the employees. The empirical data was translated by the authors themselves using Open AI’s ChatGPT and Google Translate.

ANALYSIS OF THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The empirical material has been studied several times; meaningful themes have been identified, sorted and analyzed based on the theoretical framework of this study as described above in an iterative process. Consequently, when themes became clearer in the empirical data in each analysis round, a search of the literature was performed to assist us in interpreting the findings. This analysis involved a continuous return to the study’s purpose and issues.

The first step in the analysis is to study data sentence by sentence and to code what was regarded as important units of meaning. By using the analysis questions as a guideline, we were able to place codes under each question; the following quote, for example, has been coded as identifying and reducing increased vulnerability.

The security situation in the international arena is becoming increasingly complex. There are currently no signs of tensions diminishing, and the capabilities of the Swedish Armed Forces must be adjusted to an enduringly deteriorated security environment over time. ... Russia is strengthening its military capabilities and, through its actions, challenging the European security order. ... Sweden must be prepared to counter attempts at systematic influence on society as a whole. (Budget submission, 2020, p. 2)

Other codes are “reducing personnel scarcity,” “bringing economic gain,” “employee work-life conflict and disloyalty,” and “reduced organizational attractiveness.”

The results section is divided into three parts. Each begins with an analysis question based on the question battery set out by Bacchi (2009). After each, both the purpose of the question and how it can be answered with the help of empirical illustrations are presented. The results section ends with conclusions linked to each individual part.

It should be pointed out that the budget submissions and the decision on which the conceptual analysis is based are public documents that can be downloaded and which are not subject to confidentiality. Through a joint discussion of the content of the decision in relation to the analysis issues, as suggested by Bryman and Bell (2015), the authors were able to meet requirements for inter-rater reliability, as we could agree on the discourses that are not problematized in the current decision or the budget submissions.

It should also be mentioned that the study does not intend to generalize or to describe an empirically based result. It is a discourse analysis in which the researchers themselves have analyzed a small amount of empirical data with the help of the WPR method in order to fill a research gap.

RESULTS

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM AND WHAT ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPIN THIS PROBLEM?

According to the discourse analysis, we find that the focal point of these submissions is the reduction of organizational vulnerability. The current leadership of the Armed Forces is the product of many years of governance based on peace rationalization efficiency. This means that power and control have been concentrated in a central location. Centralization, however, has created vulnerabilities which needed to be addressed immediately. For this to be possible, proposals were made for a new organizational structure and a new management. The purpose of this reorganization was to be able to meet future challenges (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017).

Three assumptions underpin the representation of the problem: identifying and reducing increased vulnerability; reducing personnel scarcity; and bringing economic gain. The centralization of the Swedish Military is understood as a factor related to this vulnerability. A first assumption in the decision on relocation is that a concentration of management staff in the same location gives increased vulnerability; a geographical spread of staff would then reduce this vulnerability in favor of a robust and sustainable management system:

By being located in several places, improved preconditions are achieved for a robust and sustainable management system. The proposal will result in three new organizational units being formed through a merger at the tactical level of current production management and operations management under an army commander, a naval commander and an air force commander. ...

The Swedish Armed Forces believes that new locations for the above staffs reduce the vulnerability of the management organization...” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017, pp. 2, 3)

A second assumption underlying the budget submissions and the relocation is that the decision on organizational change will reduce personnel scarcity. In all budget submissions (2020–2024), the issue of competence supply is discussed as a challenge, emphasizing the importance of

both recruiting and retaining existing personnel. For example, the following quote from the decision document states that the relocation plan will generate three separate units that will be a matter of managing with scarce resources, both short- and long-term:

The Swedish Armed Forces proposal for new command and organization means that new organizational units are created and new locations added. ... The proposal means that three new organizational units will be formed through a tactical merger of the current production management and operations under an army commander, a naval commander and an air force commander. ...

It is partly a question of gathering the power of scarce resources and partly a question of supply-side long-term at group level as well as at individual level. ...

With regard to extensive military retirements in the relatively near future, officers will be a scarce resource in the Armed Forces. The Armed Forces believes that maintaining such a scarce resource at higher management levels is best achieved through geographical and managerial centralization to a region (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017, pp. 2, 3).

A third assumption is that the organizational change in terms of relocation will bring economic advantages. It is noted that it may be a matter of increased cost in a short time perspective, but which is expected to bring positive financial effects in the long run: “This [relocation] means reduced rental costs by around SEK 20 million in the 2016 price situation” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017, p 3). Further:

The organizational changes, including the location of the three tactical staffs outside Stockholm’s inner city, entail cost decreases as some of the current high rental levels in central Stockholm can be reduced. Investments in management support systems and infrastructural investments must be made at the new locations. The Swedish Armed Forces’ assessment is that, even though proposed measures may initially result in increased costs, this will be balanced out over time by reduced rental costs. The Swedish Armed Forces also believes that renting within the state gives the authority greater future freedom of action in the event of the necessity of developing operations, as well as better control over future cost increases. (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017, p. 7)

Similarly, from the Budget Submission:

The Swedish Armed Forces announced in the budget documentation for 2022 that the work of reviewing the structure and location of existing organizational units would continue, with the aim of achieving synergies and increased economic efficiency. During the year, a review has taken place regarding the location of the FMLOG leadership and staff. (Budget Submission, 2022, p. 29)

This concludes our analysis of the problem of organizational vulnerability, and the three main assumptions underpinning it. Relocations are also mentioned in the Swedish Armed Forces budget documentation on several occasions (see, for example, Swedish Armed Forces, 2023, pp. 29–30), with the same argumentation regarding economic incentives. In keeping with this, we will move on to discuss what has been left unproblematized in the problem presentation.

WHAT WAS NOT IDENTIFIED IN THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM OF ORGANIZATIONAL VULNERABILITY?

In all the studied documents, economic incentives, costs, growth of the war organization, and resource allocation in different parts of the organization are carefully considered (Budget Submissions, 2020–2024; Swedish Armed Forces, 2017). At the same time, employee work-life balance and employee loyalty are not problematized. Even though it is noted in the decision that “More than 300 people are affected by the three tactical staffs’ new locations” (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017), the problematization found in the selected empirical data appears only to emphasize military strategic gains and financial effects, thus not potential implications for the private lives of the organization’s members. With relocation and organizational growth, it

may be necessary for employees to move from one place to another, to undertake a longer commute on a daily or weekly basis, and thus to potentially spend a substantial amount of time away from home.

The ways in which employees affected by the decision will react to the relocation, if they are indeed willing to move to new places, towns and premises, and how this may affect their private lives, is not problematized. Will each individual maintain enough time for both private life and working life if the work role requires increasingly more time in connection with commuting, participation in exercises, or rank-enhancing training that takes place in the town of the new location (see for example Hedlund, 2019)? In consequence, the first aspect suggested to be left unproblematized is how the decision to relocate may affect the balance between employee work life and private life, both of which require commitment, time, and dedication.

Greenhaus and colleagues (1989) identified a clear connection between absence from the family and overtime and perceived conflict and imbalance between private life and working life. When individuals feel that they do not have time for any of the “greedy institutions” (Coser, 1974), conflict, stress and pressure tend to arise. Particularly consuming is the situation where one party must set aside more time for work and all home responsibility lands with the other partner alone, who must then perform the everyday family chores such as picking up and dropping off children at preschool and school, shopping, participating in leisure activities, and taking care of the daily operation of the household.

In keeping with this, a second assumption concerns whether the level of socialized military loyalty to the armed forces as an employer can continue to remain high despite the decision on organizational change and its potential effects (Jones, 2010). Decisions made in the organization concerning relocation, in particular, can, as noted above, entail a cost for the individual on the personal level due to conflicting demands from the organization and the family. Managing the balance as an individual may mean taking a stand on where loyalty should principally lie – to the family or to the organization? – and the unmanageable cost of losing this loyalty. This can depend entirely on which organizational characteristics dominate: narcissism, greed, anorexia, or destructive growth (Alvinus et al., 2018). This can be exemplified by the point in time when the individual is no longer willing to pay the price for expected loyalty to the armed forces in the event of a relocation. Similar results have been demonstrated in a previous study (Orthner, 1990). That staff loyalty will never fail or change and will remain intact appears to be taken for granted. While loyalty contributes to an individual’s identity and meaning, and thus to the organization’s survival and special position (Bolman & Deal, 2019), the assumption that loyalty is unshakable needs to be problematized.

In summary, vulnerability concerning the balance of employee work and private life is not addressed in the decision, potentially challenging employee loyalty. The question of the effect can this have if it is not addressed in future decision-making? This leads us to the next analysis question.

WHAT ARE THE LIKELY EFFECTS OF THIS REPRESENTATION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL VULNERABILITY?

Representing the problem of organizational vulnerability as a problem of centralization, economic gain, and personnel scarcity, disregarding attention to the dynamics of work-life balance and loyalty, may cause work-life conflicts; the disloyalty and the reduction in organizational attractiveness provoked may prompt employees to begin to plan their exits and difficulties in the retention and recruitment of personnel.

The specific need for new personnel is highlighted in the Budget Submission for the year 2022 (p. 26), where it is also explained how the personnel should grow and in which areas recruitment should take place: “The organizational personnel development and growth are planned based on the war units with their constituent units, as well as which war units or constituent units are planned as standing, mobilization, or home guard units.” Lacking concrete description, this phrasing centers the needs of the organization. Obviously, it may not be appropriate to include such details in a budget report. When it comes to the relocation decision, the document mentions that about 300 people will be affected by the decision, besides the organizational positive financial effects. Nowhere in the decision or in the budget submissions is it mentioned how these individuals will react to organizational changes such as the relocation, if they are willing to move to new places, towns and premises, and how this may affect their private lives.

Neglecting individual consequences can have grave consequences. It can be assumed, from the perspectives on organizational greed (Coser, 1974) and post-scarcity (Alvinus et al., 2018) that decisions that do not similarly emphasize the effects of relocation at the individual level may be counterproductive, giving rise to employee work-life conflict, potentially challenging organization member loyalty. There is much empirical evidence that this may be a consequence; a number of studies have been carried out and our assumptions are supported by research (Coser, 1974; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1989). According to Vuga and Juvan (2013), it has also already been found that work demands tend to take more time from the family than vice versa, which may have negative effects on military families.

There is evidence of the importance of the employer's ability to present itself as attractive for both retaining and attracting employees (Österberg, 2018). If the individual does not feel involved, and if loyalty is jeopardized, resistance to decisions may be created and, in some cases, exit strategies formed. Hence, a second presumed effect of the relocation decision may be reduced organizational attractiveness, which in turn risks threatening staffing as organization members seek ways out in order to resolve conflicts between their loyalties to work and private life (Oskarsson et al., 2021). The individual, that is, chooses to leave the Swedish Armed Forces for another employer with safer and more predictable working conditions (Alvinus et al., 2019).

Employees form an increasingly crucial asset to the organization (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2014), which makes it important to recruit the best. This is just as important for the Swedish Armed Forces (Österberg, 2018), especially when the civilian sector and the private security sector attract military personnel (Berndtsson, 2019; Strand & Berndtsson, 2015). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) believe that attractiveness, or employer branding, creates two important processes for the organization. One is a matter of what the organization is associated with; the other concerns the degree of loyalty. Positive associations are assumed to strengthen the image of the organization and lead to it becoming more attractive to potential employees. This, in turn, tends to affect loyalty. The fact that Western military organizations, especially in Europe, have experienced their challenges in terms of employer attractiveness is evidenced by several studies (Berggren & Ivarsson, 2001; Lievens, 2007; Lievens, et al., 2005). Reasons given for terminating employment in the armed forces by both female and male officers include shortcomings in or poor personnel policy, an unsustainable family situation, and conflict between the needs of the family and the need to participate in long training periods. Relocations and reorganizations were also mentioned as reasons for resignation (Berggren & Ivarsson, 2001). Several decades later, the same type of problem could arise, even if the 1990s were characterized by cuts while today's focus is growth (Nordlund, 2022). In a more recent study, Emma Oskarsson and her colleagues (2021) identified concerns among newly employed Swedish officers regarding the constant strain and future family building as potential reasons for leaving the military.

WHAT CAN BE REGARDED AS A REASONABLE SOLUTION TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL VULNERABILITY?

The potential effects described above, if presumed, include conflicts between an employee's work and private life, followed by resistance, disloyalty, and exit strategies. Yet all the above aspects indicate a number of uncertainties linked to organizational change in terms of relocation, of which those neglected appear to stem from employees coping with conflicts of loyalties between work and family. As there seems to be a connection between reorganization and problems concerning the perceived balance between work and private life, it is vital to identify strategies and measures to which organizational support may turn with the aim of preventing this type of problem. Results from a number of studies show that perceived organizational support contributes to increased well-being, greater health benefits, and increased motivation to stay at the workplace (Langford et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Thompson & Prttas, 2006; Wethington & Kessler, 1986). Particularly significant is the support given by managers to subordinates to reduce conflicts between work and private life (Campanico et al., 2019). In order for staff to be able to handle absence from family, a variety of forms of organizational support are offered to the employees and to their relatives, although recent studies show that the organization could do more for its employees as needs increase (see, for example, Ohlsson et al., 2021).

When designing organizational support for reorganization, the effects of relocation at the individual level should be discussed and encouraged rather than taken for granted (as it tends to be when decisions of this kind are taken). It has been suggested that one way attractiveness

may be increased is through the alignment of employer and staff values (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2014). To understand that process, life course theory (Segal et al., 2015) has been useful in making sense of the events of individuals, their families, and the military organization and how they affect each other (De Angelis et al., 2018). One conclusion for the organization must be that organizational support should be designed to reduce challenges related to work-life conflict in order, among other things, to maintain employee loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study of the documents and the decision made by the Swedish Armed Forces, the main conclusion in this study is that balance between the work and private lives of the employees was not considered. The article suggests that if these types of issues are not addressed in this kind of decision, organizations may lose their attractiveness and future staffing may be threatened. In other words, managing vulnerability from a somewhat one-sided economic incentives perspective has shown to potentially threaten the actual presumptions inherent in the initial decision – namely that relocation will reduce vulnerability, personnel scarcity, and ultimately bring economic gain. Inability to apply a more holistic framework means that aspects related to resource scarcity are thus not fully addressed in the final decision, which may indeed amplify vulnerability in relocation.

We live in an individualized society with accelerating technological development and digitalization (Rosa, 2013). Individuals tend to value their own needs to a greater extent than collectivist values. The Swedish Armed Forces, as a collectivist organization built on cohesion and loyalty, needs to be able to meet the individual's demands for a balance between work and personal life if the organization's attractiveness is to be maintained. Decisions and policies should be able to be modernized based on new societal and individual demands.

By employing the distinct questions in Bacchi's (2009) WPR method, we were able to discern the impact of organizational aspects on the work-family relationship, and vice versa. The integration of theoretical perspectives has not been previously emphasized in research within this context. Existing studies on organizational changes typically highlight efficiency and the extent to which organizational members either accept or resist the change. In conjunction with the analysis of empirical material, we contribute to the understanding of the interplay between organizational challenges, the decisions made in response to these challenges, and potential consequences for the military family, ultimately influencing organizational attractiveness. Furthermore, this study is distinctive in that it contributes to understanding how organizational members are compelled to meet the demands of the organization while simultaneously remaining loyal to the demands of their family. This issue holds significance in the Western context, given that numerous defense forces have undergone similar transformations and resource reductions, yet are now compelled to fortify themselves due to global uncertainties. In particular, the documents selected for study here can be regarded as reflecting the period when security concerns beyond Sweden's borders escalated due to Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. These are documents, that is, of a particular type, belonging to a specific period.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Every organization undergoes a multitude of changes. The Swedish Armed Forces have been subject to both cuts (Bergström et al., 2014) and development (Alvinus et al., 2018), in this study understood as organizational anorexia and destructive growth. If growth is to be possible, however, a number of decisions needs to be made, not least that growth must be regulated so that operations may be synchronized so that they are in line with one another: one branch of operations must not be developed more than any other, thus instigating competition, as previous studies have shown (Alvinus et al., 2018). Our suggestion, grounded on the findings of this study, is that decision-making needs to be based on proper and holistic impact assessments in which both financial and human aspects are emphasized to mitigate organizational vulnerability.

Different risks should be weighed against each other, in a fashion similar to the method used by this study, in order to raise awareness of the aspects that otherwise tend to be left unproblematized. Even if the organization itself does not bear responsibility for its employees' private lives, research shows that work-life conflict may affect organization performance in fundamental ways (Jones, 2010; Kees et al., 2015; Langford et al., 1997). In the light of this study, we identify a number of practical implications and suggestions for further research.

Another research contribution could be an interview study, with contributions from staff at all organizational levels, on their experiences of the decision's effects. In addition to interviews based on the results of this study, it would be necessary to validate the conclusions with the help of a broad-based questionnaire study.

LIMITATION AND USEFULNESS OF THIS APPROACH

While studying documents may be regarded as a limited in terms of empirical evidence, the decision and budget submissions exert an extensive effect on employees; this constitutes sufficient empirical illustration.

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COMPETING INTERESTS


The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have contributed to data collection, analysis, writing of the text, and revision. It should be noted, however, that Aida Alvinus and Sofia Nilsson can both be considered the manuscript's principal authors.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Aida Alvinus  orcid.org/0000-0001-5070-4979
Swedish Defence University, Sweden

Sofia Nilsson  orcid.org/0000-0002-8422-8840
Swedish Defense University, Sweden

Camilla Sjölen
Swedish Armed Forces, Sweden

Gerry Larsson  orcid.org/0000-0001-8274-6065
Swedish Defense University, Sweden

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