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Crisis Specific Social Networks: The Interplay between Organisational Legitimacy and
Personal Trust

Topic 2: Networks and Networking

Olof Ekman, Student

Christian Uhr, Student

Reference: Olof Ekman

Lund University

Box 117, S-22100 Lund, Sweden

+46 705 251275

olofekman@hotmail.com

Abstract

Interpersonal trust has been recognized as key for co-ordinating multiple actors in non-hierarchical contexts, such as in endeavor specific social networks with multiple and culturally different actors. Despite this recognition, post response evaluations more often than not find that trust has been detrimentally fragile. We argue that such networks may build interpersonal trust through transfer when network members are new to each other, and that such transfer is related to how network members (trustors) perceive the legitimacy of the organization to which the trustee is associated. According to our view, an organization seen as legitimate (by trustors) in a specific endeavour may provide its representative (the trustee) with a starting capital of trust, but that this capital is fragile to cultural enactment. We base this on observations that suggest that, even if an organization is trusted, its culture may carry fundamentally different interpretative frames and that these frames, if enacted, may quickly erase a network members' starting capital of trust. We propose a model for this interaction in multicultural endeavours, building our argument on recent literature and illustrate our thoughts with participating observations from humanitarian relief efforts in Zaire, Kosovo the Tsunami response and a chemical discharge response in Sweden,

Key concepts

Endeavor-specific social networks, interpersonal trust, organizational legitimacy, interpretative framing,

Introduction

Several scholars agree that trust can lead to co-operative behaviour among individuals and groups (e.g. Jones and George, 1998; Mayer, Davis and Shoorman, 1995; McAllister, 1995) Trust may thus be key for co-ordinating multiple actors such as in endeavor-specific social networks with multiple and culturally¹ different actors. Despite this recognition, post-response evaluations often seem to find that trust in such settings has been detrimentally fragile. In this paper we suggest a mechanism for non-experiential

¹ Borrowing from Herberle (1951) and Turner and Killian (1972) description of movement ideologies as referred to in Oliver and Johnston (2000) we define culture as the belief system consisting of the entire complex of ideas, theories, doctrines, values and strategic and tactical principles that is characteristic for an entity such as the military, diplomats, or the humanitarian community. Such a belief system tells the individual how to look at events and people, providing a simplifying perspective to make sense of complex phenomena and find definiteness in uncertain impression.

based interpersonal trust in endeavor-specific social networks, drawing on existing literature from the domains of organizational legitimacy, personal trust and interpretative framing. We argue that endeavor specific social networks are likely to build interpersonal trust through transfer from other perceived personal attributes when network members are new to each other, and that such transfer is related to how members (trustors) perceive the legitimacy of the organization to which the trustee is associated. According to our view, an organization seen as legitimate (by the trustors) in a specific endeavour may provide its representative (trustee) with a starting capital of trust, but that such a capital is fragile to cultural enactment through interpretational framing. We propose a theory outline and illustrate by applying our outline to cases from humanitarian relief operations; Zaire 1996/7, Kosovo 1999 and the Tsunami 2005, and a multi-organizational response to a major accident in Sweden 2005.

The humanitarian relief cases as portrayed are based on the author's participating anecdotal observations as recalled from memory. The chemical spill reponse has been analyzed from a network perspective and several interviews have been made.

Crisis response social networks

Most researchers seem to distinguish between organizations and networks, such as Atkinson and Moffat (2006) who suggest that formal organisations rely on *rules* while networks are founded on *trust*. According to them, networks are defined by the very trust that unites them, but that they need the formal organisations for shelter and support. The tension between networks and organisations can thus be seen as a tension between trust and rules. Atkinson and Moffat argue that networks have different forms and types of trust, just as formal organisations have different rules. These trusts determine how different networks function, which means that there is a latent tension between networks that surface when they are to co-operate. The degree of trust that exists, or emerges, between the networks determines how well they co-operate (Atkinson and Moffat, 2006). Podolny and Page (1998), on the other hand, avoid distinguishing between organizations and networks by positing that “[f]rom a structuration perspective, every form of organization is a network...” (Podolny and Page, 1998, p. 59). Although we recognize the perspective of Atkinson and Moffat we in this article use the term *social networks* to include formal organizations as well as informal networks. We also avoid distinguishing between macro, meso and micro levels of such networks, in this article assuming similar trust mechanisms for all levels.

The typical endeavor contains culturally different entities such as military, diplomatic and development networks. These elements often have fundamentally different perspectives on mission means and ends, with friction in co-operation and co-ordination as a result (Bland, 1999, Okros, 2007). As the number and early arrival of organizations often is a surprise for co-ordinating actors (Quarantelli 1998) we believe that the endeavor specific social network emerges quickly and operates under urgent, demanding and evolving circumstances. Given time, networks may develop into smoothly running mechanisms,

edging towards Karl Weick's Virtual Role Systems.² Endeavor specific social networks however often have little time to develop such understandings. They may rather display what McGinn and Keros (2002) call arms-length transactions; between actors who share little familiarity or affect and no prolonged past or expected future social ties. These are different from socially embedded transactions facilitated by dyadic or structural social relations between actors (McGinn and Keros, 2002, with reference to Granovetter, 1973; Coleman, 1990; and Becker, 1991). This is likely to create problems for developing the interpersonal trust that is generally believed to be central for successful endeavor specific social networks (Stephenson and Schnitzer, 2006, Strömberg, Pettersson, Svenmarck and Thurén, 2005).

Interpersonal trust

Trust, seen as psychological state (Lewis and Wiegert, 1985) in the form of an expectation of beneficent treatment from others in uncertain or risky situations (Foddy et al., 2003, in Yuki, Maddux, Brewer and Takemura, 2005), is typically called for in situations where another person has the potential to gain at one's expense but can choose not to do so (Yamagishi and Yamagishi, 1994, in Yuki et al., 2005).³ For the purpose of this article we refer to the Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) definition of trust;

"...the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to control or monitor the other party" (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995, p. 712)

Interpersonal trust can often be sourced and channelled through established networks and friendships (Atkinson & Moffat, 2006) but temporary social networks seem to develop a different form of immediate and co-operation enabling trust. The Meyerson, Kramer and Weick (1996) concept of swift trust, which links to the stability of network member's professional roles, is one of the more noted explanations of such trust.⁴ Meyerson et al. found that swift trust is often centred around, and bounded by, each individual's competent and faithful enactment of a critical role in their network. Conversely, out-of-role behaviour could breed distrust (Meyerson, Kramer & Weick 1996).

² Karl Weick describe social developments in which the role system in a group is eventually understood by each member; then each member becomes a group and can, without communication, reconstitute the group and take on any role that is vacated (Weick, 1993)

³ Trust is distinct from confidence in that both refer to expectations that may lapse into disappointments. The normal case is that of confidence, whereas trust requires a previous engagement and presupposes a situation of risk. If alternatives are not considered, confidence is at hand. If choosing one action in preference to others in spite of the possibility of others, the situation is one of trust. Trust is only possible in situations where the possible damage may be greater than the advantage sought after (Deutch 1958, in Luhmann, 2000). If the risk remains within acceptable limits, trust is not needed - rational calculation suffices (Luhmann, 2000).

⁴ Meyerson, Cramer and Weick describe *Swift Trust* as role-centred trust within temporary teams whose existences form around a common task with a finite life span. Such teams stem from the same overall culture (e.g. the film industry) but consist of members with diverse skills, a limited history of working together and little prospect of working together again in the future. (Meyerson, Kramer & Weick, 1996)

Trust between unfamiliar individuals can be based on *transfer*, through which trust in an unknown target is influenced by trust in associated targets, as a known individual, organisation or firm (Granovetter, 1985, and Strub & Priest, 1976, in Doney, Cannon & Mullen, 1998, Stewart, 1999). Lynne Zucker (1986) distinguishes between transfer through trust based on institutions and transfer through trust based on process. Whereas institution-based trust is the product of formalised social structures, process-based trust relates to the behaviour of a specific actor. Zucker finds that process-based trust originates from confidence in third-party entities to ensure common standards and good conduct rather than the characteristics or history of a particular actor (Zucker, 1986, in Spicer and Pyle, 2002, see also Möllering, 2006). Similarly, category based trust is conferred on an individual based on their membership in a group of category, while role based trust refers to their role in a network (Kramer, 1999). Bart Noteboom (2006), however, conditions such trust with the trustee's behaviour. He suggests that individuals can be trusted based on the trustworthiness of the collective entity they stem from, providing that these individuals properly represent their organisation's values and adhere to rules of trustworthy conduct. (Noteboom, 2006, see also Möllering 2006).

Although differing in perspectives, these concepts of trust and mechanisms of transfer to focus on social networks that are more or less institutionally homogenous and whose members share the same fundamental culture, norms and values.⁵ We find endeavor networks different from such social networks as endeavors often contain multiple cultures interacting in situations where individuals are unknown to each other and perceived risks are high. In such cases, initial trust is likely to be fragile (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998) Nicole Blatt hints towards the particularities of endeavors when she separates operational trust from other forms of trust: "Operational trust is the trust that is required from every person and every entity to accomplish an endeavour. ... The key difference in operational trust compared to other types of trust is that this level of trust is required, not just desired." (Blatt, 2004, pp. 5-6). This leads us to propose that organizational legitimacy may very well provide individuals in endeavor specific social networks with a starting capital of trust but that faithful role/cultural enactment through interpretative framing may, contrary to the above, in fact be detrimental for the subsequent development of trust.

Organizational legitimacy

Organisational legitimacy, defined by Mark Suchman (1995) as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574), has among researchers become a central concept for the normative and cognitive forces that constrain, construct and empower organisational actors.⁶ Audiences perceive

⁵ Tonkiss and Passey (1999), for example, show that in British voluntary organizations, trust is strongly linked to shared values.

⁶ Organizational legitimacy has been framed in two distinctive perspectives; *strategic* and *institutional* legitimacy. The strategic perspective sees legitimacy as an operational resource, assuming managerial control over the legitimisation process. The institutional perspective suggests that external institutions interpret the organisation and that cultural definitions determine how the organisation is understood and evaluated. Separate from these perspectives, three different types of legitimacy can be discerned,

the legitimate organisation as more meaningful, more predictable and more trustworthy (Jepperson, 1991, in Suchman, 1995). Stronger legitimacy brings more influence; to avoid questioning an organisation only need to “make sense” to its audience, but to mobilise affirmative commitments it has to “have value” (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, in Suchman, 1995). The concept of value is also reflected in how response organisations choose whom to co-operate with (Koelega, 2006, in Fredholm and Göransson (eds.), 2006). Opinions differ on whether organizational legitimacy is manageable or not. Singh, Tucker and House (1986), for example, conclude that “[l]egitimacy is a conferred status and, as such, is usually controlled by those outside the organization. It results from congruence between societal values and organizational actions.” (Singh, Tucker and House, 1986, p. 176, with reference to Pfeiffer and Salancik, 1978; Dowlings and Pfeiffer, 1975; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). David Campbell (2000) on the other hand finds that “...legitimacy theory would suggest that social disclosure can be used to narrow the legitimacy ‘gap’ between how the organization wishes to be perceived and how it actually is. ... In essence, legitimacy theory suggests a convergence of the type and volume of disclosure with the concerns of the most influential stakeholders.” (Campbell, 2000, p. 83). Dynes and Qurantelli (1970) makes an important distinction for the agency centric crisis response context by pointing out that organisational legitimacy implies not *legality*, but being accepted as the *appropriate* agency for carrying out an activity. Kostova and Zaheer (1999) observes the importance of factors such as foreignness, cognitive distance between “home office” and the fielded unit, liability of newness, local organizations etc. in their legitimacy model for multinational enterprises under conditions of complexity.

On the individual level Stephenson and Schnitzer (2006) find that in the absence of personal relationships and knowledge for personal judgements, professionals “...may nonetheless extend trust to their counterparts in other organisations on the basis of perceived organizational legitimacy and competence.” (Stephenson and Schnitzer, 2006, p. 230). Podolny and Page adds that if an actor’s partner in a network form of organization possesses considerable legitimacy or status, then the actor may derive legitimacy or status through that affiliation (Podolny and Page, 1998, with reference to e.g. Baum and Oliver, 1992, Stuart et al., 1997 and Stark, 1996)

Although opinions differ on whether an organization can consciously manipulate its legitimacy or not, literature seems to agree that the concept is linked to societal values and organizational actions, as well as being transferable to individuals in the form of an initial starting capital of trust. We believe that these mechanisms apply also to endeavor-specific social networks, but that such starting capitals of trust may be negatively affected in the short term when network members try to make sense of the words and actions of unfamiliar others. To support this belief, we turn to literature’s descriptions of interpretative framing

pragmatic based on an audience’s self interest, *moral* based on normative approval, and *cognitive* based on comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness (Suchman, 1995).

Interpretative framing

The notion of frames was introduced by Gregory Bateson who showed that social interaction always involves interpretative frameworks by which participants define how others' actions and words should be understood (Bateson, [1954] 1972, in Oliver and Johnston, 2000). Elliot, Kaufmann, Gardner and Burgess (2002) explain how actors create such interpretative frames to make sense of a situation they find themselves in, to find and interpret specifics that, to them, seem central to understanding the situation, and to communicate this interpretation to others. Framing, a largely discursive process, is thus both the creation of the interpretative frames and the communication of them. Burgess et al. notice that actors are normally not aware of how they frame a situation, but may become conscious during negotiations, when crafting arguments to persuade others to one's own point of view. Oliver and Johnston (2002) point out that *frames*, individual cognitive structures that orient and guide interpretation of individual experiences, are distinct from *framing* which is a behaviour by which people make sense of both daily life and the problems that confront them. They describe frames as the algorithms by which people decide how to act and what to say and framing as the interactive process of talk persuasion, arguing, contestation which constantly modifies frame content.

Frames are neither static, nor limited to the individual. Benford and Snow (2000) find collective action frames to be "...constantly constituted, contested, reproduced, transformed and/or replaced during social movement activity. Hence, framing is a "dynamic, ongoing process" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 628). Frame transformation constitute redefining activities and events that are already meaningful from the standpoint of a primary framework in terms of another framework, a system alteration that radically reconstitutes for participants what is going on. Such transformation may be domain specific; a particular aspect previously taken for granted or acceptable is then reframed as problematic or vice versa (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986, with reference to Goffman, 1974).

We find interpretative framing by individuals in endeavor specific social networks likely to be anchored in their cultures, defined as the belief system consisting of the entire complex of ideas, theories, doctrines, values and strategic and tactical principles that is characteristic for the entity in which the individual is rooted, such as the military, diplomatic corps or humanitarian relief community. These different belief systems tell the network members how to look at events and people, providing a simplifying perspective to make sense of complex phenomena and find definiteness in uncertain impressions (Turner and Killian, 1972, in Oliver and Johnston, 2000). Although endeavor colliding cultural frames may thus set in motion the frame transformation dynamics described above we believe that before any actual frame alignment occurs these conflicting frames are likely to affect the supposedly fragile trust between unfamiliar individuals. In the following we outline our theory of an endeavor specific social network mechanism for how interpersonal trust may be related to organizational legitimacy and interpretative framing.

Theory outline

Based on the above and for the purpose of this article, we refer to the following definitions of this article's key concepts:

Endeavor-specific social network – the set of personal relations dominated by arms-length transactions; transactions between actors who share little familiarity or affect and no prolonged past or expected future social ties (McGinn and Keros, 2002) between multiple and culturally different actors, existing limited to the context of a specific endeavour or specific response to a crisis.

Interpersonal trust – “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to control or monitor the other party” (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995, p. 712)

Organizational legitimacy – “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574)⁷

Interpretative framing – the mental mechanisms in social interaction that help participants define how others' actions and words should be understood (Bateson, [1954] 1972, in Oliver and Johnston, 2000), make sense of a situation they find themselves in, to find and interpret specifics that, to them, seem central to understanding the situation, and to communicate this interpretation to others. (Elliot, Kaufman, Gardner and Burgess, 2002)

Combining the concepts presented above, our assertions are we suggest that:

- Endeavor specific social networks, whose members are new to each other, are likely to build interpersonal trust through transfer;
- Such transfer may relate to how network members (trustors) perceive the legitimacy of the organization to which the trustee is associated.
- An organization seen as legitimate (by the trustors) in a specific endeavor may provide its representative (trustee) with a starting capital of trust;
- Such a starting capital of trust is fragile to cultural enactment when interpretative frames conflict.

Simplified, we propose that for endeavor specific social networks the above-defined concepts may relate to each other as follows:

⁷ In this paper we distinguish *legitimacy* from *legality* – the degree of accordance with law, rules and regulations – and *authority* – the power vested in an entity leading to the submissive behaviour of others.

Organizational legitimacy → starting capital of interpersonal trust
Conflicting interpretative framing → erosion of interpersonal trust starting capital

Illustrating cases

In the following we present four cases to which we apply our theoretical outline. Three are participating observation cases from humanitarian relief operations; in Zaire 1996/7, in Kosovo 1999, and during the Tsunami 2005, in which the first author participated. The fourth is an analysis of a multi-organizational response to a major chemical discharge in Sweden in which the second author participated as an observer and later on carried out an analysis of the response operation. To us the cases from Zaire and the Tsunami are examples of organizational legitimacy providing a starting capital of trust which is eroded by conflicting interpretative frames. The Kosovo case is an example of the opposite; a lack of organizational legitimacy providing a starting capital of distrust, which is eroded by a conscious effort to suppress or avoid cultural interpretative frames. Our analysis of the chemical discharge includes two examples where organizational legitimacy provided a starting capital of interpersonal trust. In the first example conflicting interpretative frames partly eroded interpersonal trust, whereas in the second example harmonizing interpretative frames supported a maintained level of trust

Zaire, airfield photo shoot

Context

When: Nov 1996

Where: Kenya, and Zaire (Congo)

Endeavor: International humanitarian relief effort in Zaire (Congo)

Role of main author: Air Dispatch Officer for one of the humanitarian relief flight operators.

Event

In 1996, an international humanitarian agency contracted a European Air Force air transport unit to fly humanitarian relief from Kenya, into Zaire. The general impression within the military air transport unit was that the humanitarian agency made its choice based on the military units' good reputation from successfully taking part in previous similar missions. The head of the humanitarian mission in Zaire, who knew the military contingency commander from previous missions, conducted a pre-mission brief with the military contingent on arrival in Kenya, but did not interview or screen any of the individual crew members. The briefing clearly pointed out that the humanitarian agency policy precluded any photographing in the mission area, which none of the military crewmembers contested at the time. One of the first flights went to a remote airfield in Zaire, with the aircraft and crew members wearing humanitarian agency markings and patches. On landing the crew was surprised to find the airfield patrolled by an unknown

and heavily armed paramilitary unit. During unloading, a military crew member took several pictures. The act was noticed and reported to the humanitarian agency as hostile information gathering, which caused the humanitarian agency to consider terminating the contract with the military air transport unit. The crew member was sent home but the mission was otherwise completed as planned. For a couple of years after the incident, the humanitarian agency was rumoured to be less interested in contracting the military unit than before, partly due to the incident.

Analysis

Framing the event in our theory outline produces the following relations:

- The organizational legitimacy of the military air transport unit as perceived by the head of the humanitarian mission in Zaire (the trustor) → a starting capital of interpersonal trust for all members of the military crew (the trustees) manifested in a lack of personal interviews or screenings.
- The diverging interpretative framing of the military presence at the airfield in Zaire (impartiality vs. information gathering) → an erosion of the interpersonal trust for at least the photographing crew member, possibly for the military air transport unit as a whole.

The head of the humanitarian mission seemed to have trusted the military crew member to represent the mission in accordance with humanitarian community standards and values. As no personal interviews or screening were conducted, this capital of trust seemed to have been based not on personal knowledge but inferred from the military force's legitimacy as a proven working partner and from history based trust for the military contingency commander. The collective disapproval of photographing during the pre-mission brief could be seen to reflect an interpretative frame, possibly generic for the humanitarian relief community, which operational behaviours supporting mission impartiality takes precedence before operational gain. Furthermore, we find it reasonable to believe that this frame was seen to be shared also by the members of the military air crew after the briefing. The fact that the military crew member despite this decided to take photos at the air field in Zaire could reflect a military generic interpretative frame that gathering information motivates taking operational risks. If so, the military crew member's action could be explained with conflicting interpretative frames rooted in differences between the humanitarian and the military culture. We find it reasonable to assume that the reaction to the event caused the initial capital of trust held by the humanitarian head of mission to erode, at least concerning the crew member in question.

Tsunami air Medevac

Context

When: Jan 2005

Where: A Scandinavian Foreign Office

Response: Evacuation of nationals following the Tsunami

Role of main author: Military LO, providing military operative support to the evacuation effort.

Event

The air transport evacuation of national Tsunami disaster survivors was initially coordinated from the Foreign Office in the capital through a hastily scrambled small number of civil servants. After a few days the Foreign Office accepted a military offer to assist with an air transport experienced liaison officer. By then, the number of casualties estimated to require transport was just starting to decrease as a combined result of the evacuation effort, spontaneous recoveries and repeated hospital inventories. A foreign government then offered to the Foreign Office a second medical evacuation flight, available for embarkation in the disaster area some twelve hours after decision to launch. This created a delicate dilemma for the military officer and the civil servant; if the then-current casualty numbers would remain valid, the aircraft would be filled. If, on the other hand, the trend of decreasing casualty numbers persisted, the flight would not be needed. The Foreign Office civil servant on duty suggested cancelling the flight, arguing that a redundant flight would carry a political cost. The military officer suggested launching the flight, arguing that even the mere possibility of need was enough a motive. In the end, the offer was accepted and the flight was launched. In the meantime, the casualty numbers continued to decrease and the flight was turned around half way when it became evident that it would not be needed. With hindsight, the civil servant considered the launch as a regrettable mistake, while the military officer did not. Following the incident, the military officer experienced less exchange of information and inclusion in the decision making at the Foreign Office.

Analysis

Framing the perceived Tsunami air Medevac event in our theory outline produces the following relations:

- The organizational legitimacy of the military as perceived by the Foreign Office civil servant → starting capital of interpersonal trust for the military liaison officer, manifested in the civil servant partly releasing operational control to the officer.
- The diverging interpretative framing of the air Medevac launch dilemma (operational safety versus political risk) → erosion of the civil servant interpersonal trust for the liaison officer.

The Foreign Office accepting the offer to provide a military officer may be seen to reflect an initial capital of trust transferred from a perceived legitimacy of the military as a provider of competence in the situation at hand. The discussion between the officer and the civil servant when deciding if to accept the foreign government offer of a second medical evacuation flight forced both to formulate arguments to support their respective points of view. Their different perspectives suggests that they created interpretative frames rooted in their professional cultures; the Foreign Office civil servant focused on political risk – bilateral relations with the foreign government - whereas the officer focused on safeguarding operational effect –deploying the aircraft for operational freedom of action even if likely not to be needed. When the launched flight turned out to be redundant, the officer and the civil servant again judged the situation differently. Interpreting the launch as a regrettable mistake, the civil servant framed the outcome differently to the officer, who continued to believe that the right decision had been made at the time. The perceived effect of the event, a gradual exclusion of the officer from information flows and decision-making, implies that the civil servant's trust for the officer, or at least his advice, had eroded.

Kosovo humanitarian airlift

Context

When: May 1999-Aug 1999

Where: A United Nations agency headquarters in Geneva

Response: Humanitarian airlift in the Kosovo crisis, operational level.

Role of main author: Operational co-ordination of the humanitarian airlift

Event

Early in 1999, an unexpectedly high pressure from the Kosovo crisis humanitarian relief flights far exceeded the capacity of the local airports. As a result, the UN tasked the one of its agencies to co-ordinate these flights. The agency, realizing it lacked staff with appropriate skills, asked the Kosovo crisis troop contributing nations for help. The nations responded with mainly military personnel who operated a United Nations Air Co-ordination Centre (UNACC) from February to November 1999 in the agency main building in Geneva. Although dominated by military professionals, the formal understanding was that the UNACC staff members were to appear as civilians and consider themselves fully and only affiliated with the UN agency. There were thus no uniforms in the centre. The UNACC was however at all times headed by an air force Lieutenant Colonel. By the time the centre became operative, other military, governmental and non-governmental actors had operated in the endeavor for several weeks. During the whole period, the UN agency struggled to manage the large volume of refugees resulting from the armed conflict. Until late summer 1999, the UNACC had problems getting information from the UN community as well as from the military. In-house meetings called by the centre saw low attendance from the humanitarian agencies and the military air operational headquarters in Vicenza, Italy, was slow to respond to

requests for co-ordination. Directives issued, such as NOTAM:s⁸ seemed to have limited impact; air operators often seemed to try to circumvent the centre and gain access to the limited air field capacity through other channels. When queuing for lunch in the UN agency dining hall, anti-military comments were made to the staff members. Few people spontaneously visited the centre despite several publicly announced invitations. The impression was that of distance and a general reluctance. The head of the UNACC made a conscious effort over a period of three months to develop and nurture personal relations in a very low key and informal fashion, consciously socializing with individuals in the humanitarian as well as the military community during and after office hours. The problems gradually faded away and by late summer the operation ran smoothly. At that point the head of the UNACC rotated and was replaced by an individual with similar background and qualifications. A slight deterioration in working conditions seemed to follow shortly after.

Analysis

Framing the perceived Kosovo humanitarian airlift event in our theory outline produces the following relations:

- The lack of organizational legitimacy of the military manning of the UNACC as perceived by the humanitarian community as well as other military actors → starting capital of interpersonal distrust, manifested by an unwillingness to interact and exchange information.
- The conscious avoiding of interpretative framing by creating personal relationships → erosion of distrust and creation of trust, manifested in gradually improving operational effects.

This appears to be a situation in which the mechanisms were reversed. In addition, they seem to have appeared on the collective level rather than the individual level. The humanitarian community, busy with refugees resulting from military action, seems to have seen the military lacking legitimacy to administer the humanitarian effort,⁹ which, according to our thinking, could have led to the distrust felt by the military staff. Instead of starting off with a starting capital of trust based on organizational legitimacy, the staff first had to erode a starting capital of distrust in order to gain acceptance and then build a capital of trust to be able to generate operative effect; to successfully co-ordinate the humanitarian relief air transport. The general gaining of an in-house acceptance suggests that the conscious social effort paid off, not by modifying interpretative frames but by evading framing situations and promoting personal bonds. The staff may thus have built working relations based on experience-based trust.

⁸ NOTAM, Notice To AirMen, is the internationally agreed information channel for temporary arrangements concerning air operations on airports, airfields and enroute.

⁹ Such comments were actually made during informal dinner conversations in the UN agency dining hall.

Helsingborg chemical discharge response

Context

When: Feb2005

Where: Helsingborg, Sweden

Endeavor: Multi-organizational societal response to chemical accident

Role of second author: Observer during the actual response and active in a study focusing on the multi-organizational network that was established during the response.

Event

At 4:36 AM on February 4, 2005, a cistern on an industrial estate near a residential area in Helsingborg, Sweden collapsed. In a short time 16 300 tons of sulphuric acid was discharged. As a result of a reaction of the sulphuric acid with salt water a cloud of poisonous gas spread towards the city. The slush that remained on the ground also threatened to collapse other, similar cisterns in the area. The societal response involved various organizations. Initially, the fire and rescue service was the dominant actor in the operation, but representatives from city administrations and the company that owned the cistern also played important roles.

Analysis

During the response personnel and equipment from various organizations in southern Sweden were engaged to meet the demands. The resulting network of decision makers contained agents who had no formal relation to the local fire and rescue service but became involved as a result of informal relations with decision makers from the local municipality. In some cases decision makers, subordinated to the chief of the local fire and rescue service, came from other municipalities and also other counties. These professionals were not known by the entire response network but their organization was recognized because of their similarities in structures and societal roles. Instead, in those cases scepticism to the “unknown” commanders’ adequacy emerged, such scepticism was based on the view that “they lacked local knowledge”.

In the affected region, there was also a stand-by chemical unit which could be used in situations such as the one described here. This was a formalized resource and a result of cooperation agreements that were highly influenced and driven by two particular commanders with special expertise. These individuals were commonly known as authorities in the particular field. We find that these two experts, although officially subordinated to several tactical decision makers in the chain of command, had a great influence on how the operation developed. Their established on-scene “chemical-staff function” worked close to, and closely with, the company’s own crisis organization and the official on-scene commander. These two commanders seem to have been recognized by the fire and rescue organizations in the region but not by all the decision makers in the multi-organizational response network that developed. Despite the ambiguity of their formal hierarchical positions in the response organization the interviews did not reveal any negative attitudes towards their involvement in the response operation.

We analyse the chemical discharge response as two different cases. In the first of these two cases we focus on the formal involvement of decision makers from other municipalities in the local fire and rescue service. In the second case we focus on the involvement of “informal” decision makers who came to play an important role for the operation without being central in a formal hierarchy. Below we frame the response in our theory outline produces the following relations:

Formal Decision Makers

- The organizational legitimacy of the decision makers from other municipalities/counties → a starting capital of trust for the “foreign” commanders manifested in a formal acceptance for incorporating them in the network.
- The diverging interpretive framing of the actual context → an erosion of interpersonal trust for some commanders based on their “lack of local knowledge”. Examples of “lack of knowledge” can be: not knowing the organizational culture, unfamiliarity with the municipality’s crisis management structure and insufficient understanding of geographical conditions.

Informal Decision Makers

- The organizational legitimacy of the external chemical experts as perceived by the local fire and rescue services, the company and other actors (the trustors) → a starting capital of interpersonal trust for the personnel in the chemical staff team (the trustees) manifested in their influence on the tactical alignment of the response operation despite the lack of high formal authority as well as the fast recognition by other response organizations, such as the company.
- The harmonized interpretative framing by the experts, the local fire and rescue service and the company → a support for the expert commander’s initiatives and significance for the response operation during the critical phase.

In the first case, where decision makers were incorporated in the network partly as a result of to personal relations, the new members of the response organization seem to have had had a starting capital of trust which could have been related to them belonging to organizations that normally deal with emergency situations. These individuals would thus have been associated with an organizational legitimacy to be involved. As a result, other actors, such as the health care or the police, seem to have seen no reason to doubt the commander’s competence. During the observation of the response operation the second author could not detect any scepticism or lack of trust for these individuals. However, in the aftermath several “local” commanders expressed their hesitation” concerning the incorporation of the “foreign” personnel on tactical and strategic decision functions. These views could indicate competition on a personal level, but could also be seen as a manifestation of different interpretative framings. In the second case, in which the commanders established an important and influential function (the “chemical staff

function) in the response network, could be seen to interpretively framed the situation in harmony with the local fire and rescue service, the company and other actors.

Discussion

We have provided a theoretical background and suggested a theory outline for the relationships between organizational legitimacy, interpersonal trust and interpretative framing. To illustrate, we have applied our theory outline to four cases. We believe that these cases reflect the whirling complexity of multicultural social interaction dynamics in modern endeavors. We also think that there are some interesting differences between the cases.

In the Zaire case, the trustor (the head of the humanitarian relief operation) and the trustee (the military crew member) were two individuals that never interacted directly. What we have labelled as conflicting interpretative frames were developed at different points in time and space, with the trustor not present during what could possibly be described as an enactment of a military culture – photographing at the airfield in Zaire. The frames were also different; verbal as opposed to action. This not only opens for other explanations for the development but also for questioning if the concept of interpretative frames really is applicable in this case. It is difficult to estimate if and how the photographing actually affected anyone's trust. The humanitarian consideration to terminate the military crew's participation in the mission may have been a signal only, intended to reinforce standards in the own community as well as the military. The same could be said about the humanitarian agency rumoured loss of interest in contracting the same military unit again. However, the military commander's act of sending home the individual indicates that at least the military commander at the time felt a need to act with authority, indicating that the implied loss of trust was taken seriously by both sides.

In the Tsunami case the event was clearer cut; two individuals (the military liaison officer and the Foreign office civil servant) interacted verbally face to face, relying on what we think was an identical set of data and both interpretatively framing a developing situation twice. The causes and effects are also more likely to be free from confounds. The Foreign Office accepting the offer to provide a military officer may have been a political act only. However, actually granting the officer a level of operational authority over the flights and including him in the decision making suggests a degree of trust for the liaison officer. Since the officer and, to our knowledge, the officer's immediate superiors were unknown at the Foreign Office such a capital of trust was likely inferred either from the legitimacy of the Armed Forces in general as a provider of competence in the situation at hand. The diverging interpretative framings could have been affected by other factors. The civil servant could have had background information that the officer lacked, but being co-located, sharing the same information and, to our knowledge, not discussing the issue with anyone else, it seems reasonable to assume that they both judged the situation at the same time and from identical data. The gradual exclusion of the liaison officer from information and decision making following the event may have stemmed from less need for assistance since the worst part of the evacuation was over, but since there still were several days of urgent work to do this to us seems unlikely.

The Kosovo case refers to a main actor (the head of the humanitarian air transport coordinating centre) with a number of secondary actors (his staff) interacting with a culturally diverse collective over several months. It describes an inverted situation in which a lack of organizational legitimacy may have caused a distrust that would account for the perceived slow information and communication processes with the humanitarian agencies as well as the military points of contact in Italy. This was possibly managed by avoiding interpretative framing in order to build history based trust that could help to bridge cultural differences. The improvement of working relations could have resulted from a general improvement of the Kosovo situation and subsequent less pressure on the involved agencies, but the general gaining of in-house acceptance suggests a conscious social effort that paid off. This would also provide a possible explanation for the perceived deterioration of the working conditions following the head of unit rotation.

The contextual frames in our last example are slightly different compared to the first three. In the societal response to the discharge of sulphuric acid no military or international organizations were involved and the actual consequences of the accident were delimited to a small area and had no human casualties. Despite the many contextual differences the consequences of interpersonal trust and the result of harmonizing or non-harmonizing interpretative framing appear as observable phenomena. On a general level, we believe that there is a relation between high influence in an emergency response network and trust relations and our hypothesis suggests that shared interpretive framing is favourable for the maintenance, or the increase of interpersonal trust. Opening for a different line of thought, the sense of a general reluctance to interact with the coordinating centre may have had a temporal dimension - the co-ordinating body entered late on the operational scene, at a time when other actors already had established roles and relations. We find this temporal aspect, the effects on trust related to an actor's time of entry in an endeavor, to be worth exploring further.

Concluding remarks

These cases presented in this paper provide no evidence but serve only to illustrate our lines of thought. The mechanisms of organizational legitimacy, trust and interpretative framing, as well as how they relate to each other, are also difficult to pinpoint in real world settings, as reflected in other writings. Easy targets as they are for criticism of validity and reliability we realize that by presenting them we risk having to run the gauntlet. However, we welcome criticism hoping for a constructive discussion that could lead to a more refined and testable theory. We speculate that a possible extension of our theory outline could focus on what we touched upon earlier; endeavor dynamics to investigate how an actor's (trustee's) time of entry relative to other actors (trustors) in an endeavor affects the degree of legitimacy as perceived by other actors (trustors). We also suspect that the sources of organizational legitimacy may be dynamic in relation to temporal phases, such as the formation, fine tuning and dismantling stages of endeavor specific social networks. We suspect that during a formation stage trustors may derive organizational legitimacy mainly from the established organisations to which a response network member (trustee) is affiliated; during a fine tuning stage legitimacy may be derived more from the actor's (trustee's) role in the network; whereas during a dismantling stage – as the situation normalizes and priorities start to shift from the

endeavor to every day issues – a trustor may revert to deriving legitimacy from the organisations to which the trustee is affiliated. We believe that the existence of such dynamics could be tested in controlled settings, such as micro-world experiments.

Combining theories of organizational legitimacy, trust and interpretative frames are to us a promising new approach to help explaining why endeavors seem to have such a hard time overcoming cross cultural friction. If interpretational framing – the actual and engaged formulation of an argument to present a perspective to someone with a different view, or the enactment of a belief system in contrast to another – is needed to make actors aware of their frames then little less than actual operational experience with other cultures may seem to provide individuals with operatively useful understanding of these cultures. In a multi-cultural endeavour a stock phrase can trigger only a hint of a particular culture with someone who only knows the outlines of that culture, whereas someone who knows it well may associate to the full richness of the culture (Oliver and Johnston, 2000). If we want individuals to avoid stumbling on such hints we need to go beyond current interoperability training and in a greater scale consider long-term cultural exchange postings in training centres, headquarters and fielded units.

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