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The process of sensemaking during organizational crisis

Exploring the process of sensemaking during the refugee crisis at the Swedish Migration Board

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Abstract

Sensemaking theories has been discussed in many studies, however the idea the sensemaking and sensegiving process might still be under-researched. Ideas such as institutions' role in sensemaking, cognitive barriers, sensemaking during crisis has been given less consideration. This study is conducted to study the sensemaking process at the Swedish Migration board during the refugee crisis. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding for the sensemaking process during the restructure process that the organisation has been through due to the referred crisis. In this study, a background of the crisis was given to better understand the interdependency between the organisation and the surrounded environment in addition to the empirical data that were divided into three phases; expansion, reduction and the post crisis stage. The focus in the theoretical frame was on the effect of identities and roles change on sensemaking and the relationship between micro and macro actors and its implication on sensemaking. The study's aim is to reduce the shortage regarding sensemaking during organisational crisis and extend the knowledge of the relationship between identities, micro and macro actors and sensemaking.

Keywords: Organisational Crisis, sensemaking, sensegiving, Macro actors, Micro actors, restructure, identities, politics.

Introduction

In the context of crisis, organisational change is considered as a necessary need in order to survive (Dopson et al. 1998). Successful crisis management may, therefore, help organisations to avoid or at least to mitigate the effects of a crisis. However, crisis-driven changes tend not to last (Murray and Richardson, 2002). Furthermore, crisis can be defined as unexpected, specific and non-routine event or series of events which generate equivocation, unpredictability, and uncertainty that threaten organisations' goals (Ulmer et al. 2007). Alas et al (2010) pointed out crisis as a low probability event that has serious consequences, but a short response time. Hence, organisations, in crisis situation, change by materialisation of new organisational pattern to face the next evolution phase (Greiner, 1978). Moreover, the

need to change is emerged to face internal crisis such as persistent needs to implement new technique or restructure workforce (Gerald, 2004). Grouard and Meston (1998) identified some external crisis as a catalyst to change such as demographic and political situation, socio-cultural factors and legislation issues. These authors also suggested a definition to organisational change, i.e. *"the process of radical or marginal transformation of the structures and competences set up in the process of the development of the organizations"*. Thus, transformation of structure as well as competences is one of the key factors in the process of change which, according to Ferguson (2010), is different from transition processes. Transition, therefore, is when organisations reorient the competences in order to response to changes, which, especially in crisis eras, can take time. Consequently, the change used to be followed by restructuring organisations' workforce and departments.

Furthermore, a crisis provides powerful sensemaking triggers (Maitlis et al. 2014). Thus, While unfolding crisis, sensemaking is highly triggered (Christianson et al., 2009; Weick, 1988). This process has gained many definitions across streams of research, for instance, Cornelissen (2012) defined sensemaking as *"the processes of meaning construction whereby people interpret events and issues within and outside of their organizations that are somehow surprising, complex, or confusing to them."* Thus, many of previous works have considered that sensemaking occurs when individuals aim to understand surprising or confusing events that generate ambiguity in order to clarify the blurred atmosphere. Sutcliffe (2013) illustrated that sensemaking goes beyond interpretation to involve active and continuous authoring of events to face the environment variables surrounding organisations. Hence, the importance of sensemaking is obvious in many organisational processes such as strategic change and decision making (Rerup & Feldman, 2011), innovation and creativity (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 1999) and organisational learning (Catino & Patriotta, 2013). In addition to change in organisational structure, roles and responsibilities which trigger sensemaking by creating contradiction and paradoxes for the members. By that being said, sensemaking is central activity during organisational change and cornerstone for organizing (Maitlis et al. 2014).

Most of the scholars have agreed that crisis is a stimuli for sensemaking. However they diverge on several aspects, such as how it is constructed, to which extension it is shared and the orientation of sensemaking (Maitlis et al. 2014). One of the main deviations between sensemaking scholars is the contextual aspect which is portrayed as more individual and cognitiv in some forums (Klein, Moon, & Hoffman, 2006) while others believed in the social and discursive nature of sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005; Weick et al., 2005). In addition to this disagreement, the time scope of sensemaking was controversial even though many depict it as a retrospective process, yet some consider the prospective aspect of sensemaking (Gephart, Topal, & Zhang, 2010). However, this contrast in how to define sensemaking embodied and reflected in wide range definitions.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) stated that sensemaking is incomplete until there is a sensegiving process that goes in parallel with sensemaking. Rouleau (2005) juxtaposed these two processes and claimed that sensemaking is managers' way to understand and create sense

of information about strategic change in order to, later on, give sense to employees to influence and orient outcomes as they desire. Basically, sensegiving is a process by which individuals seek to direct the sensemaking of others (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Furthermore, both processors are strongly related to narratives and scholars have therefore considered sensemaking/ sensegiving as interchangeable with constructing narratives (Currie & Brown, 2003).

Even though sensemaking has been prominent in many studies, yet there is still a need to cover the interdependency between change and sensemaking during crisis. In other words, change and crisis researches share many similarities that are not oftenly distinguished by scholars (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). In addition to the fact that there is little evidence on the existing understanding on sensemaking during crisis and crisis management (PergeL & Psychogios, 2013 P 199). Therefore, this study will offer a further research on sensemaking during crisis when a governmental agency exercised crisis management during restructuring its workforce. By that, the study will examine the micro-socio perspective and the actual discourse. Moreover, a discussion about sensemaking in the micro level and it is relation to changes in a macro level will be provided. In order to address this phenomenon, the study will answer the following research questions:

RQ: What was the role of the restructure process on sensemaking during the organisational crisis? What was the role of identities and roles on sensemaking during organisational crisis? And what is the effect of micro actors' sensemaking on the organisation structure?

In order to study the phenomena of the sensemaking during crisis this article will address the restructure process that occurred in the Migration board due to the refugee crisis. A longitudinal study that offers an illustration for the pre-crisis period, during crisis and post-crisis era will be provided.

Previous studies
Christianson and Maitlis (2014) pointed out Karl Weick's book (1969) "*The Social Psychology of Organizing*" as the first published mention of sensemaking in an organisational context. When Weick's seminal article, 'Enacted Sensemaking in Crisis Situations', was published in 1988, it caused the field to think very differently about how crises unfold in organizations. In the face of crisis such as Bhopal (Weick, 1988), Tenerife (Weick, 1990), and Mann Gulch (Weick, 1993) Weick discussed the phenomena of sensemaking collapse while groups are facing unfamiliar and ambiguity situations. In this context, Maitlis et al. 2014 also argued that while some crisis trigger sensemaking, yet in some other cases, crisis could inhibit sensemaking from being triggered.

Weicks (1995) pointed out seven dimensions of sensemaking process: social, identities, retrospective, cues, plausibility, updating that is encouraged or discouraged and the approval of proactive or reactive action as the best one to be copied. However, Weber and Glynn (2006) argued that Weick (1995) takes too little account of a specific component of the context in terms of sensemaking, namely institutions. Weber and Glynn (2006) claim that the

lack of connections between institutional theory and sensemaking has to do with the traditional view of the sensemaking literature, where institutions create cognitive limitations for this process. The authors mean, however, that there are interesting links to be found between institutional theory and sensemaking and the role that institutions play in sensemaking.

Other several scholars discussed sensemaking during crisis mode, for instance, Christianson (2010) addressed the sudden collapse of the roof of the B&O Museum which gave the opportunity for the organisations' members to learn from this disaster. According to the author the crisis paved the way to implement important organizational routines to better equip the organization for the future. Other studies that shed a light on the learning from crisis is a study by Catino and Patriotta's (2013) about the Italian Air Force. The study declared that in-flight problem is essential for pilots to make meaning of them, thus to attempt avoiding any errors in the future. Furthermore, Kayes (2004) concluded that in the case of breakdown in team learning the outcomes could be catastrophic. In the 2006 Everest disaster, the study indicated, eight climbers died because of the insufficient sensemaking of the situation. The climbers could, therefore, survive if they appreciated the ambiguity and tried to make sense of the new circumstances instead of continuing to work on the basis of prior beliefs.

Other studies Helm Mills (2003) addressed the influence of power differentials among individuals and deduced that even though sensemaking is the way that new mindset and acting incorporate in organisations. However, the accepted practises emerged by negotiation that involved actors who are powerful than others. In other study by Yu (2005) who exposed the serious consequences when sensemaking is missdirected during change initiatives. Because of that, the studied organisation, which operated in healthcare sector, was deviated from the core function, i.e. helping patients. Consequently, change processes can consume energy with little positive outcomes in case sensemaking is directed to narrow set of cues. On contrast, an example that showed the right direction of sensemaking is in Nag et al.'s (2007) study of an R&D organization. Organisation's members here constructed a massive understanding that the organisation would not be shifted to market-oriented firm. However, the leaders succeed to create mutual understanding of the importance of the transformation. Thus, the study proved that it could be problematic for sensemakers when priorities subsequently shift. Mantere et al.'s (2012) emphasized the previous result after studying how employees in a Nordic public sector organisation struggled to make sense of the return to the status quo as positive after cancelling a merger initiative.

Finally, there is inadequate dialogue across streams of research that highlight sensemaking, despite the extensive interests for this phenomenon. That resulted clear disconnection among conversations that discuss sensemaking.

Theoretical framework

Sensemaking is crucial to understand change. Organisational sensemaking starts with asking the question; how do things come to be an event for organisational members, secondly, the question becomes: what does an event mean? In the actual organisational life people face different events and ask themselves " what's the story here" After configuring an answer an event will be brought to life which will help them to act and continue to act whilst they make sense of their experiences (Weick & Obstfeld, 2005). Sensemaking in organisations kan be seen as an attempt to induce intrinsic flux of human actions, to direct it to certain ends and thereafter to generalize and institutionalize specific meanings and ideas (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, p. 570). Sensemaking is also about categorizing and labeling the experiences heap by conducting a strategy of *"differentiation and simple-location, identification and classification, regularizing and routinization [to translate] the intractable or obdurate into a form that is more amenable to functional deployment"* (Chia 2000, p. 517). In organizing, functional deployment means to label interdependent events in order to suggest preferences about how to act in specific situations. In order to generate a collective ground, labeling enable actors to create cognitive themes and by that that generate recurring behaviors, i.e *"For an activity to be said to be organized, it implies that types of behavior in types of situation are systematically connected to types of actors An organized activity provides actors with a given set of cognitive categories and a typology of actions"* (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, p. 573).

The cornerstone in this theoretical framework is Karl Weick's study "organizing and the process of sensemaking". The study discussed the nature of sensemaking from different views, i.e. conceptually and prospectively.

Sensemaking Viewed Conceptually
To conceptualize the sensemaking, it was needed to tightly link into actions as a system that act and react interdependently with the environment (Warglien 2002, p. 110). The origin studies agreed upon the retrospective nature for sensemaking, in addition, it is also treated as reciprocal exchanges between actors and their environments. This interaction will create meaning and a chain of selection and retention actions, however just in the case these interdependency between actor and environment is believed or doubted, with other word, makes sense. Furthermore, only with some ambiguity or ambivalent use of previous knowledge the sensemaking will be able to detect any errors and try to learn from it and by that actions change (Jennings & Greenwood 2003). Weick (2005) proposed a sequence of ecological change-enactment-selection-retention to conceptualize sensemaking. Simply, the environment continuously changes, thus new enactment will be taken by actors by relying in sensemaking to better understand the changes. However, sensemaking may shift concepts or may be categorized by the activity of bracketing and noticing. That is why sensemaking might take different orientation in the case, for example, discrepancies and equivocality (Weick et al. 2005).

Mills (2003) argued that during uncertainties, sensemaking is triggered. Members of organisations aim to look for a meaning that makes sense of equivocality. This process

continues to be highly active as long as the world is understood in a different way than expected. However, sensemaking is not about getting the right answers, rather than it is an on-going producing for stories to help making sense for the emerging situations. Thus it is not about accuracy rather that it is about plausibility because no one will get the "right story" (Weick et al. 2005). Mills (2003) argued that what is plausible for a specific group might not be plausible for other, such managers and employees. In a study of culture change that conducted by Mills (2003), the author deduced that to consider stories as plausible, they need to be adapted to and consistent with the current climate that the sensemaking are constructed in.

However, the concept that sensemaking is driven by plausibility and not accuracy (Weick 1995, p. 55) contraries to some other studies that claimed that managerial practices that believe in the accuracy of managers' perceptions to control the quality of outcomes. These studies were built on many researches that examined managers' perceptions ability to, for example adaptive learning and the quality of strategic decision making (Gavetti & Levinthal 2000). On the other hand, some studies such as Mezias and Starbuck (2003) considered that managers' perception is highly inaccurate. However, they argued that inaccuracy does not need to be a negative attribute, because when people make sense they create new ways of thinking for the situations, thus they pave the way for learning mechanism that would not exist in case all the perceptions were right.

Another aspect in the concept of sensemaking is the identity construction. Identity construction is the root of sensemaking and affect how properties of sensemaking process are understood (Mills 2003, p. 55). Identities in organisations are crucial in sensemaking process and change processes. Actor in organisation act based on a way that represents who they think they are. This taken action by actors will provide organisations with images which represent the organisations towards outsiders (Albert & Whetten, 1985). By that, identities can be an active tool that can be changed by sensemaking process, however, identities is conceptualized in an organisational context with many other variables that affect identities continuously (Gioia et al. 2000). Therefore, identities inclined to be plausible and not accurate, just like other aspects of sensemaking.

Sensemaking Viewed Prospectively
Some authors argued to which extent sensemaking is an independent process or if it is controlled by stronger forces. Zucker (1983) discussed that people may amplify the agency of sensemaking by thinking that they obey to whatever they make sense of. The idea is people are connected to solid agendas that run by powerful actors. Thus, member in organisations have predictable themes of behaviour according to what they have been ordered. The main exaggeration according to Weber et al. (2006) is what Weick stated that "sensemaking is the feedstock for institutionalization" (Weick 1995, p. 36). Hence, Organisational members make sense in tune with orders that are dictated by powerful actors such as governmental agencies interest groups, professions, and mass media (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001). Scott (1995) expressed the idea by this definition "no organization can properly be understood apart from its wider social and cultural context". However, to understand the micro and the macro level

of change and the interdependency between these two aspects, it is crucial to examine how organisational members make sense of those orders. By other words, it is needed to notice how macro actors in a specific time influence the behaviour of micro actors who in their turn result a new macro situation (Swedberg, 1998). Furthermore, Weber's (2003) argues that while powerful actors with agencies define a problem and direct organisations' attention to it, insiders will, then, control what subsequent of outcomes will appear.

One of the important aspects to view sensemaking prospectively is emotions (Magala, 1997). When an organisation faces unexpected interruptions emotions will arise, which either are negative or positive. Emotions are the centre of events that are accompanied by discrepancies (Mandler, 1997) positive or negative changes that affect cognitive dissonance (Weick et al. 2005). What organisational members expect controls emotion, just like in a marriage couple who have a high level of expectancy towards each other. When these expectations are violated, sensemaking will be triggered thus new actions might be performed. Hence, If members in organisations have little expectation, thus the chance for discrepancy is low and emotion will remain calm (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2003). Elsbach (2002) argued that the study of emotion and sensemaking is crucial to understand whether intraorganisations are formed as a solid cognitive structure which is built around rules or is it more as a dynamic emotional structure that is built around values and attitudes.

The idea of sensemaking deals with ambiguity and fill gaps in the organisational studies. The authors use sensemaking to cover those moments in the organisational life which, maybe, are hard to be covered with others theories (Weick et al. 2005).

Methodology
Research Design
As the aim of this study is to examine sensemaking during organisational crisis, a qualitative research method needed to be conducted. Bryman och Bell (2013) stated that qualitative research contains great emphasis on how the individual perceives and interprets their social reality. Patel and Davidson (2003) also believe that qualitative interviews are the appropriate approach if the study intends to investigate characteristics, attitudes and thoughts that the respondent has about a particular phenomenon. Since the focus is on investigating employees perception of organizational restructures during crisis, qualitative approach is considered as the right one. Furthermore, I will use case study method since it combines data collection method, i.e. interviews, observation and archives (Eisenhardt, 1989). Bryman and Bell (2013) also point out that a case study is done when there is an interest in conducting a more details of a single case which is the aim of this case. Still, researches varied regarding case study method. Somekh and Lewin (2005) claimed that case studies are limited to the specific cases that they are covering, i.e. it cannot be generalized to similar studies. However, Flyvbjerg (2006) stresses that case study can be considered as a decent example or supplement for a phenomena, on the other hand the exaggerated formal generalisation is overrated whereas "the force of example" is underestimated. By that it means that the more the case study is narrowed down the more knowledge that it obtains.

The organisation is pervasive in several places and it contains units that are located in the same spots, yet organisationally belong to different regions. That is why the study paid an extra attention to cover the studied organisation by interviewing the relevant employees/ managers from different units. Beside that pervasiveness, the organisation has a vast hierarchy that varies between management (general directors and region managers), middle managers (unit managers), to the rest of the operational positions, i.e. team leaders, decisions makers, case officers and assistants. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) argue that organizations literature often ignores middle managers and also believe that they often end up in an intermediate position, between management and employee level. This fact made it highly important to offer the reader an adequate presentation and clarification to each of these roles in order to reach a better understanding. The unit managers in this study are located in the operational units with the rest of employees and where the interviews were held and will be referred to as a middle managers.

Data collection

As it has been noted above, the data were collected in three ways, interviews, documentation and observation. As an employee in the organisation, I clearly gained a extensive accessibility to many insider actors. By taking advantage of that, wide range of interviews has been conducted. Therefore, interviews have been the cornerstone of data collection since sensemaking is a social phenomenon, thus communication and verbal connection play a critical role to better understand the context that sensemaking is constructed in. Eksell and Thelander (2014) stated that interviews allow the interviewer to see the phenomena from interviewees' perspective, get a glimpse of their reality and give an opportunity for sharing thoughts and offer reflection. Moreover, Designing interviews in a semi-structured matter provided the interviewees with the possibility to develop their own response instead of being locked to fewer answer alternatives (Patel & Davidson, 2003; Bryman, 2008). Hence, it is precisely the respondent's own words that are dominating and this is the very reason for holding an interview in this case. Semi-structured interviews also let the interviews flow based on the respondent's answer (Bryman, 2008). By that the Semi-structured interviews are more flexible, Bryman and Bell (2013), and were used during the data collection.

The interviews were extended to cover different geographical areas, different roles and different units. That was in order to form a sufficient perception of the process of sensemaking and to compare this process between different positions and departments. Hence, I was able to compare how people in different hierarchical and geographic spots perceive the restructure process. Interviews were, therefore, performed with a coordinator for the transition process, unit managers, team leaders, decision maker, case officers and assistants. As the employee structure is one of the focal points in this study, the following table offers a brief explanation for every role in the operation units.

	Record and manage applications, documents and files in different case

Assistant	management systems and provide individuals with public documents after confidentiality assessment
Case officer	Investigate process, review and decide, or prepare, proposals for decisions in cases, which entail legal effect for an individual.
Decision Maker	Support and develop colleagues in legal application issues and investigation methods.
Team Leader	As a representative of the employer, the team leader supports the work with the operational management work on the unit. This involves resource allocation, coordination, follow-up and with a coaching approach guiding the daily work of the employees in the team
Unit Manager	Set goals for teams and employees based on the unit's assignment and budget. Responsible for ensuring that operational goals, financial goals and quality goals are met and followed up on the unit.

Source (Migration board, 2019)

Furthermore, since the focus is on the West-Region of the organisation, most of the interviews were held in the head office in Gothenburg and others were held in Vänersborg, Falkenberg, Borås, and Mariestad. It is also worth mentioning that some observations and interviews took a place in Kållared which is located next to Gothenburg and was organisationally included with Gothenburg. However, it has a special role, since it contains the Reception unit that faced a enormous pressure during crisis. Additionally, the ambition was to cover the different operational units, thus every units were represented at least once among interviews. Beside these interviews, four interviews were held with departures who left the organisation during the crisis (table 1).

As a part of the organisation, I have the possibility to naturally observe the internal environment, however, the observation is limited to the post-crisis era and revolve around events occurred during the second half of 2018 and the first half of 2019, i.e. during the "recovery process". However, a combination between interviews and observation is convenient approach to conduct qualitative research to link what people say with what they do (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). Being an insider facilitated the adoption of "observant as participant" approach. This, according to **Eksell** and Thelander (2014), facilitates the interaction between observers and participants of the study which in this case has a unique benefit. An observer, by interacting with the employees, will be able to dig into participants' thoughts which add value to the data collection.

The last two methods namely, Observations and interviews, were supplemented by a large amount of documentation. Internal documents, such as annual reports, protocols, budget material and prognoses were examined. Additionally, external documents were of the utmost importance for the study in order to cover political and social aspects of the crisis thus gain an adequate understanding of what events took a place before, during and after the crisis.

Even though this case study relied on a qualitative approach, however, it was redeemed from the traditional restrictions which described the case study as a method to analysis quantitative societal phenomena in projects, events and institutions. In this study, some quantitative figures have been added in order to understand the sequence of the implications of the restructuring process. The combination between qualitative and quantitative tools is therefore a necessity to absorb the change. Flyvbjerg (2006) has underlined the importance of understand case studies from modern perspectives and criticized the traditional viewpoints which totally separate these two tactics. A good social science, according to Flyvbjerg, is problem driven and not methodology driven so it can apply these methods for a given problematic. Brewerton & Millward (2001) also argued that both qualitative and quantitative approaches are important for structural content analysis and they complement each other.

Interviews (Table 1)

Region manager	1	(45-60 min)
Unit manager	2	(45-60 min)
Trade union representative	2	(45-60 min)
HR partner	1	(45-60 min)
Team leader	3	(45-60 min)
decision maker	3	(45-60 min)
Case officer	5	(45-60 min)
Departures (case officers)	4	(45-60 min)
Assistents	2	(45-60 min)

Data analysis

The grounded theory was chosen in order to analysis the collected data. Firstly, the data from all the interviews were transcribed then coded and analyzed. All the interviews were conducted in Swedish and by that an opportunity were given to the interviewees to use their mother tongue. The grounded theory generating theoretical idea from the data rather than determining ideas beforehand (Gibbs, 2010). As Martin and Turner (1986) also stated that the aim of grounded theory to stimulate new theories from data rather than just confirm the existence of old theories. Thus, this theory is suitable to deal with collected data from semi-structured and unstructured, other different types of documents and observations. As Martin and Turner (1986) stated, the grounded theory, by coding, provides the researcher with tools to refine and analysis different kind of material. The data acquired from the observation and the document analysis will also be coded and analyzed and then compared to the concepts found in the analysis of the interviews.

Limitation and Ethical Implication

Being a case officer at the organisation has its negative and positive sides. By remaining objective and try to consider myself as an outsider, I aimed to eliminate any negative effects for me being an insider. One technique was introduced by Kvale (2006) is to give the interviewees my interpretations of what they say so they can reflect on them. By that I attempted to reduce my dominance over the interviewee. Alvesson (2003) highlighted power relationship during interviews and was critical of the dominant views that exist on qualitative interviews. He believes that interviewers too often look at interview responses as real and objective, but that the interviewees could be motivated to respond in specific ways because of various underlying causes, for example based on how they want to present themselves to those who will take part in the study results. However, I was aware of this dilemma during interviews and while data were analysed, therefore I have tried to find alternative interpretations in the interviewees' answers. Furthermore, I compared the collected data from internal/external document and observation to any concepts I found in the interviews in order to judge the legitimacy of the data sources

Finally, the study takes in consideration the anonymity of the participants, therefore no identities were mentioned in the study. Inevitably, some participants possess identities in a form of a specific position that might lead to them. However, that fact was explained to them and their consent to conduct the interview was received. Beside the anonymity principle, the data privacy principle was taken into account, however, as the Migration board is a public agency, the majority of used documentation is publicly available.

Sittings

The turbulent situation in many parts of the world has caused a massive stream of refugees arriving in Western Europe over the last years. Among the western European countries, Sweden and Germany have received the largest amounts of refugees (SCB, 2015). The Swedish Migration Board has the responsibility to investigate and settle asylum applications and also to process applications for individuals who apply for residence permits in Sweden to live, visit, study and obtain citizenship (Migrationsverket, 2018). Considering the above, the Migration Board is highly sensitive to changes in politics and security on a global level. Therefore, the Board's workforce also need to be altered based on the prevailing global settings. During the fall of 2015, Sweden received an extraordinary amount of asylum seekers. As a result, the Swedish Migration Board received 163 000 asylum applications in 2015, of which 124 000 were filed during the second half of the year (Annual report Migrationsverket, 2015). This was a number twice as high as for 2014 when the number of asylum seekers amounted to 81 300 (SCB, 2016). The number of asylum seekers who arrived in Sweden during the first half of 2015 was, more or less, expected in the Migration Board's forecast for the year. However, the high level of refugees arriving during the fall was not expected (Migrationsverket, 2015).

As a result of the large amount of refugees arriving in Sweden during 2015, a large recruitment process was initiated in 2015. However, considering the inclined numbers of the asylum seekers, the Migration Board also needed to modify its operations in accordance with

the new circumstances (Prognos, 2017). The highest number of employees that the Migration Board has ever had was 8500 employees. In 2012 the number of employees amounted to 3200. During late 2017, the Migration Board had managed to settle most applications that were submitted between 2015 and 2016. In addition, the numbers of refugees arriving in Sweden was starting to decline. As a result, the Board was now facing a situation where there was not enough job to do for all of its employees (Ribbenvik, 2017). It was now the General Director's responsibility to handle this situation.

As a result of the above mentioned situation, the Migration Board was forced to make large readjustment that involved units all over Sweden. The Swedish government gave General Director Mikael Ribbenvik the task to reduce the Board's total budget with around 800 million Swedish Kronas (regleringsbrev, 2017). Considering the reduced budget, is was now evident that the Migration Board would have to reduce its number of employee and also re-organize the workforce in order to decrease costs and work in a more efficient way.

The assignments of the Migration Board are regulated by law. Every year, the Board receives financial appropriation from the government reflecting the set assignments. There is also a requirement that the Migration Board conducts an annual report, and provides the government with immigration related forecasts on a quarterly basis (Migrationsverket, 2018). The financial appropriation also comes with directions on how to direct the year's activities. This includes the budget and the distribution of the budget, and also the Board's goals for the year. Another requirement is that the Migration Board creates an annual report covering the year's activities and forecasts of the future immigration to Sweden (Migrationsverket.se, 2018).

The operational work of the Migration Board is organised in six geographic regions, North Sweden, Mid Sweden, Stockholm, West Sweden, East Sweden and South Sweden (see figure below). Each region has a varying number of units which process applications for different types of work-and residence permits. There are also units that are called Reception Units, which are responsible for providing housing, food and financial allowances to asylum seekers who are waiting for their applications to be settled. The Reception Units often work as the first point of contact forthe an asylum seeker, and they are responsible for most of the communication with the asylum seeker throughout, and sometimes after, the asylum process. This study will take place in the Migration Board's West-Region. The data are collected from all operational units in Gothenburg. These units consist of, Reception units, Asylum units, Permits units, Call centre, State Compensation units, Citizenship unit, administrative unit and others (see table below).
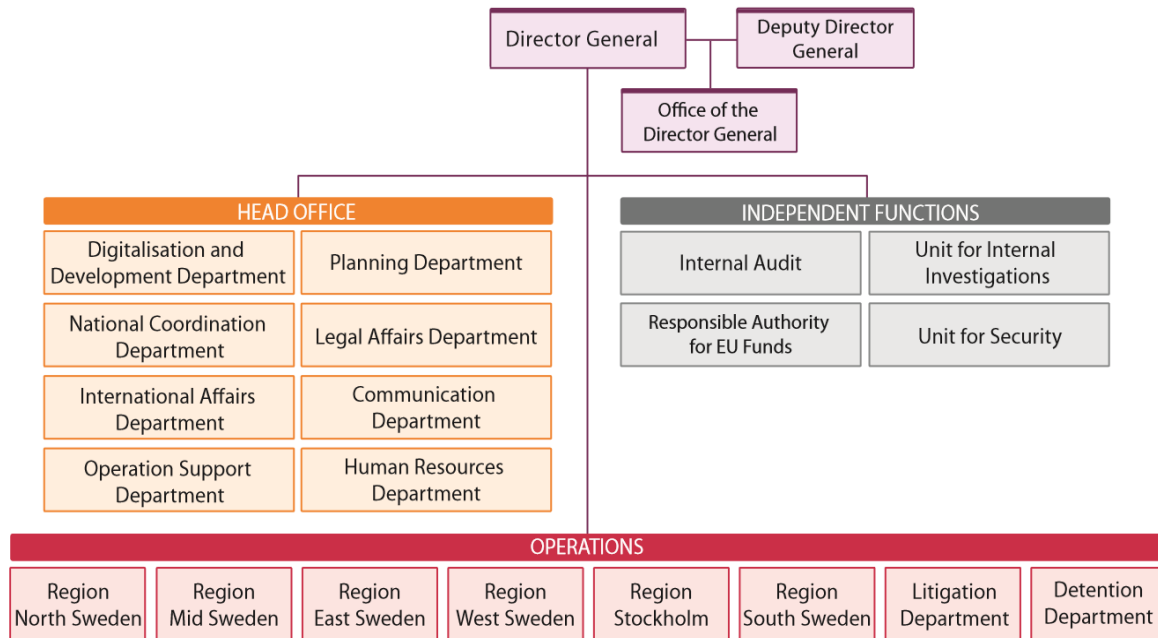
The tension situation in the organisation was tied to the political fluctuation for the politicians in Sweden and in the rest of European countries. The Migration board faced incrementally numbers of applications since 2010 when the so-called Arab Spring started (msb, 2018, p11).

One of the most significant burdens for the organisation was said to be the unwillingness from the other European countries to take responsibility to receive their ratio of refugees. The issue of other countries' involvement in the refugee reception was repeatedly raised by several actors, both Swedish and international. In a statement on the anniversary of one of the boat hijacking outside the Italian island Lampedusa, the former EU refugee commissioner Cecilia Malmström called some EU countries' refusal to receive 14 refugees for *"a shame"* (Dagens Industri, 141003). UNHCR's European manager Vincent Cochetel stated while visiting the Swedish Migration board that "*It is abnormal that two countries take such great responsibility. This does not mean that Sweden and Germany will change their reception, but that other member states should show the same commitment,*" (Interview DN, 141128).

On the domestic front, the politicians in the years before the crisis were to some extent united about how Sweden would address the refugees' reception. The former Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt signed, in mars 2011, on a settlement with the Swedish Green party regarding the migration case. The settlement facilitated, for instance, undocumented refugees' right for education and healthcare and guaranteed even a support from a majority of the Parliament for bourgeois government's migration policy (SvD, 110303).

Another actual topic in the political context was the persistent need to expand the Swedish reception system, both in the form of facilities for newly arrived refugees and in the form of reception in the municipalities for those who have received a residence permit. The problem

raised especially when some municipalities refused to sign contracts with the Migration board in order to house the unaccompanied children (children without guardian) who seeked asylum. This refusal led the Riksdag to adopt a legislative amendment that came into force in January 2014. The Act gave the Migration Board the opportunity to assign unaccompanied children to the municipalities without prior agreement (Swedish Parliament, 2012). Yet, this procedure did not solve the problem in the long term thus, in August 2014, the organisation announced that municipalities needed to double their housing capacity for unaccompanied children (MSB, 2018 P 13).

Furthermore, the unsustainable political and social situation raised many concerns for politicians who was reacting each one from its location. One of the most famous statements that aroused great attention was said by the former Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt at a summer speech on August 16, 2014, when he reminded that Sweden aimed people earlier who escaped, for example during the 1990s Balkan crisis, and he urged people to help again. *"I appeal to the Swedish people: have patience and open your hearts,"* said Reinfeldt, who at the same time admitted that the extensive refugee reception in this short term could become noticeable on the economic front (DN, 140817). However, the opposition for this generous migration policy started to grow by different parties such as the Christian Democrats which demanded a limit for refugee reception (DN, 140817).

Meanwhile, the situation inside the organization became more critical. The Migration Board was prone to physical attack in several occasions since early stages. Svenska Dagbladet published on 26 February 2013 an article about repeated vandalism of an accommodation for unaccompanied refugee children in Vallentuna in March 2012, an attack on a similar accommodation in Grums, a fire bomb against an accommodation in Österbybruk in September and window crushing on one refugee center in Arboga in October of the same year. Such attacks continued in 2015 that witnessed many attacks of which fifteen fire attacks occurred against Reception units during the first ten months of this year. Only in one week in October, four attacks had taken place, one in Arlöv, one in Ljungby, one in Onsala outside Kungsbacka and one in Munkedal in Bohuslän (GP, 151021).

Despite the mentioned opposition that surround the refugee reception, representatives of the two government parties, the Social Democrats and the Green Party, refused to discuss the the openness of boundaries, i.e how many refugees that Sweden was prepared to receive. a view that Prime Minister Stefan Löfven confirmed in April 2015 with the words: "No, there is no limit. We will receive according to the conventions we are bound by" (Sydsvenskan.se, 150429). Even the Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel sent, on 31 augusti 2015, a sign to the refugees and the other European countries by saying "*Wir schaffen das"* which basically means *"yes, we can"*. This announcement was translated as an opening for Germany's borders for the remaining refugees in eastern European countries such as Hungary (DN, 150901).

However, the ability for Sweden and Germany and their Migration boards to receive refugees started to decline sharply. The European Commission was, therefore, struggling in order to

reach a more balanced distribution of reception between countries in Europe. The commission presented a plan for 200 000 quota refugees in summer 2015 in addition to another 200 000 refugees from refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon and Turkey to be distributed later on during the autumn. This settlement was denied by Denmark, Ireland and UK due to legal reservations in their membership agreements, in addition to the Visegrad Group which consists of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The latter group was a strong opponent to fulfill their parts in the mentioned agreement (GP, 150905).

By then, the official Swedish stance on the refugee issue had changed, from being one of the most generous in the EU, to becoming one of the most restrictive. A starting point for the turnaround came on October 22, when Migration Board reported that its forecast for the number of asylum seekers in 2015 has aggressively increased (SvD, 151022). In order to cope with the refugee reception, the Migration Board estimated that 29 billion Kronor was needed in addition to already stipulated grants, or a total of SEK 60 billion in 2016. A management's comment pointed out that this was more than the budget for the entire judicial system, including the police (SvD, 151023). The events was accelerating and just one week later the foreign minister Margot Wallström indicated, in an interview with Dagens Nyheter, that the Migration Board refugee reception risked collapsing in case it would be forced to take care of as many refugees as 190 000 per year (DN, 151030). Hence, on November 24, a press conference was held in which Prime Minister Stefan Löven and Deputy Prime Minister Åsa Romson explained that Sweden would implement a number of measures to bring down the number of refugees: *"The government is open to the decision aimed at greatly reducing people's willingness to apply to Sweden"* The Prime Minister explained. Finally, the number of asylum seekers in Sweden dropped from over 39,000 in October 2015, when the figure was at its highest, to below 3,000 half year later (Annual report, 2016).

Findings

This chapter will discuss longitudinal data which have been gathered to cover both the expansion and the reduction phases. The paragraph will focus on the operational units at the organisations' west region and how staff with different positions were making sense of the restructure process during the crisis.

The first phase: Adapt the expansion

In the pre-crisis era the organisation was expanding due to the increase of the asylum seekers arriving in Sweden. Thus, the submitted asylum application dramatically increased which required a parallel increasing of the organisation workforce in order to cover the increasing demand. The organisation, via its management, conducted some procedures in order to intensify and activate the recruitment process. One of the interviewed case officers in a permit unit pointed out the adequate education that she received when she initiated her occupation at the organisation in 2012 (Interview, 2019). In 2014, additional steps were taken to centralize the workforce recruitment starting in 2015, which would enable the organisation to develop the staff planning with the aim to be an attractive workplace (Annual report, 2015). The Swedish Migration Board started to call this area "Human Resources", which

meant changing work methods towards a strategic focus on competence and leadership supply. The responsibility for all recruitment was concentrated on a joint recruitment center from 1 April 2015, which planned to focus on attracting, recruiting and retaining employees (Annual Report 14, p. 37). After establishing the joint recruitment centre the organisation recruited more than 2 700 new employees. The centralizing process was fruitless but still, in such an extreme situation, the delivery of new staff needed to be completed as fast as possible. To meet this demand, the organisation established a prioritization order and simplified the recruitment by, for example, applying group interviews. (Annual report 2015, P 127).

This simplified process lead to a qualitative effect on the legal perspective for the assessments of asylum applications, in much as a result of the insufficient training program of the new employees. Even though the organisation offered a standardized introduction program that was mandatory for all new employees from April 2015, the employees were not able to complete the program due to the enormous shortage in operations units and they need for them to start working. The Migration Board's internal system indicated that there was not even a single employee who has been hired from 1 April 2015 has implemented the whole introductory program (Annual report 2015, P 128)

However, until 2014, the employee turnover decreased by about 3 percentages since 2012 and during 2014 it was 12.3 percentages (Annual report 2014, P 37). In parallel with the turnover, the organisation, due to the increased asylum applications, was recruiting new employees which in 2014 increased by 800 employees. The expansion of the workforce was about 18 percentages, which is more than both 2012 and 2013 combined. By the end of 2014, the workforce reached 5360 employees. Employment conditions for those new employees was discussed with the central trade union organisations in order to further ensure that qualified individuals with important skills who did receive time limited contracts would be retained in the organisation (Annual report 14, p 38). One crucial matter that has been subject to review is the position structure and its nomenclature. An extra consideration was given to the need for a position structure that would give employees clear roles, ascertain a foundation for governance, follow-up and goal fulfillments (Annual report, 2014, P 38). In the 2014 annual reports' preface, the former General Director pointed out the mission to adapt to the rapidly surrounded changing environment by saying;

"It is in itself a great challenge to recruit and educate staff in a short time and there is a limit to the extent and how quickly an organization can grow without having negative effects"

The unavoidable and chaotic situation occurred when the Swedish Migration board received enormous number of applications. To deal with this expansion, several actors demanded a contingency recruitment. However, the former general director refused to recruit personnel in an early stage of the crisis. According to the trade unions, the General Director sent inaccurate sings to the government saying that the organisation would cope with the increased asylum applications without recruiting (Trade union representative, 2019). The

staff were asked to work longer and extra shifts and no vacations were allowed. The situation was expressed by the former general director by saying;

"We are looking back at a year which the history will be talking about for many decades"
<div align="right">(Annual report, 2015)</div>

Trade union representatives attempted to directly communicate with the ministry in order to induce the recruiting process. They struggled in order to stop the chaos as they expressed in the following comments;

"We already knew in September 2015 that we would not be able to do it. We went to the head of trade unions and required to speak directly with the ministry against the General Director while he had gone himself to the Ministry and claimed that we had the situation under control. We desperately needed help and to borrow staff from other public authorities"
<div align="right">(Interview trade union, 2019)</div>

Reception Unit managers who closely worked with refugees on several spots in the country were able to predict the increased need of staff. However, as the recruitment process was now a central issue no unit manager could act separately. Unit managers therefore only had a small and inadequate workforce to deal with those great crowds of asylum seekers. Eventually, a comprehensive and hasty recruitment process started right after the emergence of the crisis, i.e. During November 2015. Hence, many of the new recruited staff were inexperienced and most of them signed temporary contracts with the Reception and the Asylum units (Migrationsverket, 2017). In 2015, the number of employees increased by 45% and became 7 623 employees at the end of the year (Annual report 2015, P 129). Furthermore, the staff numbers increased from 5400 employees in 2015 to approximately 8500 employees in 2017 (prognos, 2017).

The enormous imbalance occurred at the Reception Units when they needed more employees to take higher responsibility, and as a result several assistants were promoted to team leaders. In Kållered, where the asylum seekers submitted their applications, the pressure was high and many assistants undertook higher mission than those who they were recruited for, especially the new ones who entered the job during the crisis.

"I started there in Kållared as a manager for the Reception Unit and it was obvious that we would not be able to continue like that, however in October, all of a sudden, it was not sustainable anymore. We expanded rapidly and we therefore had to promote some assistants temporarily to become team leaders. So they were given temporary assignments to those who were skilled and driven and had leadership knowledge. Twenty people cannot decide and it was pleasant to have some good team leader with me during the tough shifts otherwise I would have been manager and team leader and everything"
<div align="right">(Interview unit manager, 190522)</div>

The purpose of the new delegation was to alleviate the heavy workload for unit managers and the new guidelines meant that the responsible manager in extraordinary situations has the opportunity to delegate parts of his/her responsibility to organize effective operations. The delegation was primarily referred to the unit's team leaders and did not include an employer and personnel responsibility (Annual Report 2015, P 129). The Migration Board decision enabled time-limited appointments by unit managers to team leaders to work on their behalf. Even with this hierarchical change in positions structure, there were as many as 50 units among 128 in the operational units that had 25 case officers or fewer while the rest had even more case officers. This was despite the fact that the number of case officers per unit should not exceed 25 employees (Annual report 2015, P 128). Many of the case officers expressed their dissatisfaction because of the unfair treatment by the management who picked up some case officers to become team leaders and decision makers. Several team leaders were also disappointed that some were promoted to be unit managers while others were not. The promoted employees earned higher salaries and extra benefits while other had no opportunity to progress (Interview, 2019). One case officer who was working at the Permit unit in Borås commented;

"In 2015 and 2016, it was easy to become a decision maker and team leader because of the crisis and they retained their wages after the crisis even when they return to their old positions, which were unfair. This meant that there is a surplus of decision-makers and team leaders who are difficult to get rid of, unlike assistants who are easy to get rid of. It was very unjust that team leaders had to keep their wages even though they did not have duties"

(Case officer interview, 190324)

However, unit managers indicated their relative satisfaction with the situation and pointed out the delegation as one of the key factors that helped the organisation to come over the crisis. A unit manager in the Reception Unit stated that the culture of the organisation has changed since the crisis occurred, the need for another type of employees has aroused. She stated that;

"Basically, in the Reception unit, we needed to promote those who suited for that period. We had team leaders that I would not make them team leader today because they lacked competence, some of the old employees cannot perform those types of tasks that emerged during the crisis. It was required to make quick decisions. The old organization suited them but I do not want them in this new and dynamic organization, we needed new forces. The old were not employed for this; they were employed to inspect apartments and regular work".

(Unit manager, 190522)

In this subparagraph, the study reviews the situation before and in conjunction with the crisis. The workforce gradually started to increase, consequently the crisis forced the organisation to almost double its staff. Thus, an unforeseeable and dramatic restructure process occurred and resulted in contradictory feelings among the employees. This period lasted one year until the precursor of the reduction appeared in late 2016, which will be discussed in the next subparagraph.

The second phase: adapt the reduction

The appropriation direction from the government to the Migration Board allocated a monetary share in 2018 that was 800 million less than the year before (regleringsbrev, 2017). This retrenchment was expected, however, the time frame was tight and the directors were forced to take indefinite decisions. The General Director was in charge to coordinate and plan the process,

"This transition will give us the opportunity to strategically plan what the organisation will look like in the following years. The aim is not to go back to the organisation we were before. On the contrary, it is now that we are shaping tomorrow's organisation and developing an operation for the 2020s" (Ribbenvik, 2017)

In 2017, cooperation was initiated between different actors in order to conduct a strategy for the reduction of the new organisation. An organisation which was called the Transition Organisation (Omställningsorganisation) was created in September 2017 and led by a National Coordination group for Reduction. Their mission was to provide a foundation for how the transition process in collaboration with the Communication Department and HR Department. The National Coordination Group for Reduction also included representatives from the Economic Department, Operational Support Unit and Operational units.

In the Swedish context, the basic rule is the "seniority principle", which according to the Employment Protection Act, means that the "last-in-first-out" principle is the followed one. When negotiations in the Central Group were initiated about the transit and the dismissals, labor law specialists controlled the employees' employment period. As a first step, the negotiators agreed on which units/regions/counties that would be affected by the transition or the dismissals. By other words, the organisation controlled where the redundancies existed in order to consider shutdowns of certain units. On a later stage, the Negotiation Group was in charge to identify the term "comparable tasks" which determined which employees would be aggregated in the same group when deciding on transiting or dismissing. However, the trade unions and the management were not in tune regarding what to be considered as "comparable tasks". The conflict was related to the case officers in Reception Units and whether their tasks are comparable with case officers' tasks at the Permit Units and Asylum Units. The management claimed that the nature of the competences that are required at Permit and Asylum Units different from the ones at the Reception Units. By that, the management considered the interviews and investigations that were performed in the Reception Units to differ in nature from those that were performed in the Asylum and Permits Units. Trade union representatives were not fully convinced by that judgment and demanded the management to give reception case officers the opportunity to compete for a position in the same group. A trade union representative stated in interview that;

"The management was planning to educate all the case officers in the operational units on different types of cases in order to be called "migration case officers" instead of

asylum/permit/reception case officers. But, when we needed to retain the competence in the organisation, they refused to give opportunity to reception case officers to be in the groups with others case officers. We appealed to the Labour Court, which took the employer side and rejected our appeal"

The dispute was determined by the Labour Court, which decided that reception case officers lacked skills and knowledge regarding asylum- and permits' legislation and the social skills to hold sensitive interviews with asylum seekers (Trade union representative, 2019). In Mariestad, for instance, they Reception Units were shut removed and the case officers were dismissed. The paradox was that many of these case officers worked at Asylum and Permit units before being loaned out to a Reception Unit. They, however, were not included in the same group with case officers from the Asylum Unit in Mariestad because they, according to the Central Group, were lacking the needed skills. Four of them had a total 100 years of service with the Migration Board, the team leader was critical to hear the employer's judgment,

"It felt terrible, I have been working in the organisation since 1990 and I even recruited employees who are now not considered to be qualified enough to perform their tasks. You have the right to be dissatisfied"

(Interview team leader. 190315)

The trade unions declared that it is hard to interpret the law and to even trust the judgment taken by the labour courts. They referred to what the employment act stipulated about organisations with different operating units in geographically delimited areas;

"When redundancies take place, it may sometimes be necessary to redeploy some of the employees who may remain with the employer. They can then get other tasks than before. This right to retain a job at the workplace applies when the employee has sufficient qualifications for the new duties. The worker is considered sufficiently qualified for the new task if it does not take more than six months to learn the work"

Employment protection act (1982:80)

In an interview with main the coordinator for the transmitting organisation in the West-Region expressed his satisfaction with the exerted effort by the Central group and pointed out the good communication between the Central Group, Negotiating Group, and management as a main factor to the success of the transition in the West-Region. The management, by that, expressed its satisfaction to the judicial interpretation of the law (Annual report, 2018). Furthermore, Reception units' manager in Gothenburg also confirmed that fact that case officers' skills and competences are different between the reception's case officers and the asylums' and permits' ones.

"There are some case officers at the Reception units who were not able to take crucial decisions at the Asylum or Permits units because they have not applied for such a job and do not like it. When you put together all the case officers, it means that everyone can do

everyone's job. If we put them all together in a group where many of the receptions' case officers have worked long time. That would never ever work. We would have lost a lot competence between the new ones. We could not be able to have efficient operations. So this is the employer attitude"

(Unit manager, 190522)

On the other hand, team leaders' structure was also affected by transition process. It became obvious that the organisation had too many team leaders after the promotions that were given earlier during the expansion stage. However, according to the management, the seniority principle was not an appropriate method to proceed the process in this case, because many decent team leaders would leave. Therefore, the organisation had to make an assessment at the management level to evaluate the performance of the team leaders. This assessment was for the needed skills that the organisation seeks for their new employees such as, flexibility, perseverance and having leadership skills. The competition was tough, the list consisted of 40 team leaders of which 5 to 10 who had poor performance and the management retrieved their teams. Those team leaders, who ended up without a team, would be degraded to either assistant or case officer, however, keeping their high salaries. The next step was to check the seniority principle for the remaining team leaders on the list. Hence, the management informed those who had short period in the organisation that they could not be retained because there was not enough budget and the structure of the organization indicated that it was many team leaders. Some of them were degraded but they kept their high salaries, however without teams. Some of them left to other external occupations and other became decision makers at other units which are almost considered at the same level of importance because it is expert level for both. One unit manager who participated in the negotiation regarding those team leaders emphasised the importance of the competences that the team leaders should have, yet not all of them had it by the time the organisation needed;

"I think the organisation realised after the crisis that the problem was in the structure of our workforce, we needed new and motivated employees, we needed to plant a new culture in the organisation. Some of those team leaders made serious wrong decisions so we degrade some while others did not want to have teams because they felt this role does not suit them anymore"

(Unit manager, 190522)

In contrast with the other positions, most of the union managers were located in the safe zone and no redundancy was considered in their case. Since all of the managers have similar roles, thus they all, who are in the same county, would be aggregated in the same group in the case reduction. A unit manager pointed out the shocking message that the region manager sent it to them. "*We thought we were safe, and then the region manager came to us at the end of 2017 and said that it might be good to apply for another job as we do not know the conditions and we need to prepare for the worse*". The messages were basically sent to the whole organisation. One decision maker, who worked in an Asylum Unit in Gothenburg before her new occupation at the Swedish Tax Agency, disclosed the signs that they received from the region manager during the West-Region meeting;

"They also came with messages on regional days 2017 when they encouraged people: if you are not sure that you want to work at the Migration Board, seek out and leave room for those who really want to work here. Then we knew that there will be a lot of warning and the message during that period was that you "search it out" but then the management had to swallow up that message because there were so many who became worried and looked for other jobs. Then when many applications remain unsettled, they replaced a larger workforce with working overtime"

The ambiguity that revolved around the circles and seniority principle led to confusion among many employees. This appeared while the Negotiating Group would choose the potential candidates to leave the organisation (Internal audit report, 2017). The lack of communication with the employees created uncertainties in a sense of *"am I leaving or am I staying"* (Interviews, 2018). Hence, many employees started to seek other occupations and thanks to that other could keep their jobs. One story from the Reception Unit in Borås disclosed how one case officer retained his position because of four other case officers, who had a longer period of employment, yet they all moved to different employers before the transition process was initiated. During interviews with these four case officers, they expressed their concerns during the transition period. One of the departed case officers who is now working at the Swedish Work Environment Authority commented;

"In my unit, only assistants would be affected, however, the situation was really worrying, we didn't really know what was coming, there was new information all the time and we didn't know if it would impact us case officers. They said we will not be dismissed or it won't be transition for my unit in Borås but no one could trust it. We have increased from one Permit Unit to five Permit Units during the crisis and it is clear that there will be no need for five Permit Units in the future after 2019, hence we thought that dismissal might come in 2020 so people hinted about it"

(Interview departed, 190325)

This mutual belief among the employees regarding the ambiguity of the transition process was confirmed in several internal documents. The internal risk analysis that was conducted by the HR department referred to the stressful background for the process. Unit managers, HR department and the transmitting organization, were commissioned by the General Director to coordinate the organisation's transition work. The assignment was planned and handed out during just over a month and it was described in general and vague terms. Unit managers were asked to report the need of the workforce to the Central Group in order to determine the redundancies and which counties/employees that should to be removed. Due to the prevailing situation the reports were vague and it was even stated that there is an unclear distribution of responsibility in this assignment from the General Director (Internrevision, 2017). A HR partner has pointed out that, in some regions, the staffing plan was coordinated by introducing regional HR groups. In the West-Region a recruitment planner has been hired to develop and create a balance between the transition process and the recruitment need. They could, according to the HR department, raise their eyes and look to the whole organisation.

In certain counties, some units are located next to each other; however, they organisationally belong to different regions. Thanks to good cooperation, some of the employees escaped dismissals when the Transition Organisation could shift their contracts to units with less or no redundancy. In Gothenburg, which belongs to the West-Region, there are few units among the Operations Units that organisationally belong to the East-Region. For example, the State Compensation Unit, Detention Centre, and Call Centre all belong to the eastern union despite their location in Gothenburg. One of the case officers who worked in the Asylum unit in Gothenburg before being transmitted to the Call Centre stated pointed out how managers used to motivate staff to seek other jobs and when people did that, there were not so many who had been dismissed. Beside the fact that many of them were transferred from the West-Region to the Call Centre which from an organisational point of view belongs to the Eastern-Region;

This is not such a big transition to just move upstairs but stay in the same building, and this way, I avoided being dismissed. However, this assistant job and I was not signed for this, want to improve and to be decision makers or team leaders. At the Migration Board we have different status, at the top of the status level now are those who work with permits. Everyone wants to get there and now there are team leaders who work there and have high wages though they do a job officer, it is unfair"

(Case officer interview, 190401)

According to the mentioned risk analysis, such mentioned complications might be avoided with better communication. For example, the lack of the collaboration in Mariestad resulted losses of competent case officers. This was due to the fact that Mariestad, which is located in the West-Region, had a number of units which from an organisational point of view belonged to the Eastern-Region. These case officers were not included in the same group with the rest of their colleagues in Mariestad even though they worked in the same county and had the same "comparable tasks". The Transition organisations' coordinator commented on the mentioned collaboration;

"We had a good communication in the West-Region, however we could have had a better collaboration with other regions..., any way we have these economic conditions determined by the government that required less expenses so we had to dismiss employees, ..there is nothing to be ashamed of"

(Coordinator interview, 190415)

The prognosis, however, pointed out that during 2018 the reduction would be more than 2017. The Migration board would have to reduce more than 1,400 employees in the Asylum units and just over a thousand in the Reception units. The head office departments also faced noticeable retrenchment. Hence, the total number of employees was going to decline by about 3 000. However the annual report indicated that by the end of 2018, the organisation had 6,607 employees, a decrease of about 1,300 people since 2017. Interviews have showed how many units manager called back their staff in panic because there was so much to do. An

asylum units' manager stated that the reduction was challenging in a sense of keeping it within the time frame.

"we were optimistic in Gothenburg's figures and in how much we should decrease, because when I started we had 8,000 applications in the reception system which is a lot, and so we started to shrink but employees also started to leave. When you notice that an organization shrinks then your opportunities to improve also shrink. We managers could not move staff in case someone wanted to work at another unit, but during the transition we kept our staff. We were a little optimistic in the belief that we have fewer applications and many received other jobs so that many also left"

(Reception unit manager, 190522)

In this subparagraph, the study displayed data that are related to the transition stage and how the seniority principle and group formulation affected the structure of the employees. Furthermore, it was also exposed how managers dealt with their employees and what is their attitude towards the ongoing restructure process. On the other hand, this subparagraph shed a light on what some employees felt about the process of transition and about their new positions.

The third phase: the post-crisis stage

When the process of the reduction was in advanced stage during 2018, new circumstances was emerging all the time which made the trade union representative said that the outcomes of the crisis still affect the organisation until today (trade union representative, 190501). One of the outcomes is the temporary alien's law, presented by the government parties. This law determined that children not accompanied by a guardian at the arrival in Sweden, who applied for asylum no later than the 24th of November 2015 and who have had to wait at least 15 months for their asylum application to be settled, had the right to stay in Sweden. This right is valid as long as those children are enrolled in high schools, regardless of the outcome of their asylum application. This new legislation forced the organisation to set up new Permits Units with massive recruitment. In Gothenburg alone, the number of case officers that were required was 25. The process was, according to the West-Region manager, futile because of the absence of a clear long-term strategy.

The General Director was forced to announce a recruitment standstill in pending to overview the political situation and the budget that the organisation would obtain for the following year. That recruitment stop initiated on the 1st of January 2019 and was decided to remain until the 1st of July. However, several units manager were applying for exceptions in order to recruit staff to cope with new emerging circumstances. Therefore, that recruitment stop did not last and was cancelled during March. Permit units' manager pointed out that the pressure on her unit is bigger than other units because of all the applications that were submitted after the crisis such as reunion applications. *Especially, after Brexit, now in Gothenburg only we have 1900 applications that might be submitted regarding job residents* (Permit unit manager,

190522). The West-Region manager shared this idea and stated during a lecture about the transition;

Now, we have reached a point where we are not sure what to do. The government has not been formed yet, so we got the same monetary share that we got for 2018. However at the moment it is hard to make a move when the future is ambiguous. We have money and work to be done, but we do not have people to produce"

The management have held many meetings to plan the new organisation. They aim to go back to the old structure that the organisation had during 2012, but more effective one. The plan is to activate the concept "migration case officer" instead of having specific templates for every role. The goal is to educate and train case officers on different cases and skills. West-Region manager stated that the organization needs to be resilience in order to shift the workforce where the need exists.

"During crisis we realise that we had right employees in wrong places and vice versa. We are now planning for 2022 and our main goal is to build a solid and flexible structure that will facilitate our mission in case we face any new crisis or challenges"

Beside the above mentioned challenges regarding Brexit and the temporary aliens law, the organisation faces now a huge pressure in the Citizenship units which are located in Norrköping where the headquarter is. Namely, the waiting time to receive a decision regarding citizenship application can take to 29 months. This challenge, according to Reception unit's manager concerns us in the West-Region especially that we do not have employees that are trained for this type of applications. In this case, the organisation might have to borrow staff from the East-Region or to educate its staff for this new type of applications. However, the Reception unit's manager pointed out the West-region as strong sub organisation;

"I trust our region management that they are resourceful and thanks to the tactical decisions we have made, we have in this region very high record in asylum and permit sutteled applications. That which gives our region manager more space while negotiating for budget and assignments. When the management sees that a region has a fairly high effectiveness and also makes the most decisions so clearly that gives the assignment and we will be able to retain staff"

Discussion

The main purpose of this paragraph is to discuss the process of sensemaking that occurred at the Migration Board during crisis. Hence, the sensemaking that occurred because of the structural change in the organisation. Furthermore, it is obvious that the change in this context is derived from extreme external situations that forced the organisation to change its structure. This fact will also be analyzed in this paragraph. In addition, the study will be discussed from two perspective, i.e. manager perspectives and employee perspective.

However, it is critical to categorize the employees of the Migration Board in just two categories because of the complexity of the structure. Hence, distinctions will be noted in cases that they are needed.

The restructuring process that was initiated gave different meaning to employees based on their position in the structure which created complexity for the management. To conceptualize the process of sensemaking (Jennings and Greenwood 2003) suggested the term "enactment theory", or organizing the sequence ecological change-enactment-selection-retention. The ecological change was related to crisis, however enactment, selection and retention enormously varied between the actors and units. Since the Reception Unit was the most stricken one during crisis, it was also the one that expanded the most. However, the promotions that many assistants gained dramatically affected many other who did not recognise the new structure for their unit. In disasters, such as Mann Gulch, people's ability to analyse situations become so weak that they miss chances to rescue (Weick, 1993). At the Migration Board, many employees were not satisfied and left the organisation, i.e. after making a meaning of the change, their selection was to leave the organisation.

In the same context, this kind of situation can be described as breakdown (Patriotta 2003) or disconfirmation (Weick & Sutcliffe 2001), and just like the aforementioned situations, these have the attributes to impede the continuity and induce new plausible sense, in order to create new continuities. For some case officers the continuity breached and the sense was collapsed instead of the continuous sensemaking and many have submitted their resignation voluntarily, "*it was easy to become a decision maker and team leader because of the crisis and they retained their wages after the crisis even when they return to their old position, which was unfair*". However, a manager on the other hand claimed that the "new organisation" needed a different type of employees. A Reception Unit manager in Kållered claimed that the older ones who have worked in the organisation for a long time were hired to perform another kind of tasks and did not suit to work during crisis. She was even relief to have young and active employees beside here during the tough shifts. Mills (2003) stated that what is plausible for one group often proves to be implausible for another group.

During the process, the employees were concerned about the uncertainty and to deal with that they started to make sense of the change. Sensemaking becomes a persistent need while dealing with equivocality and this process becomes primary for people (e.g., Mills 2003, p. 44). The employees were given sheets to fill their tasks in order to be inserted in the restructure process. The management says, it is a procedure to localize the competence in the organisation and not just about transition. Employees, however, interpreted as they were facing the risk of dismissal. The sensemaking, then, occurs whenever the current state of our environment is perceived to be different from the expected state (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005, P 414). When situation feels unfamiliar the sensemaking will be activated, for instance, situations of discrepancy (Expansion vs. reduction) and breakdown (structure).

Furthermore, the fact that sensemaking is not about the accuracy and precision about events rather than it is plausibility which dominates. No one in the organisation could precisely estimate, however some took actions based on their cognitive abilities to understand things. One interviewed case officer stated that *"there are five Permit units now; of course there will not be a need for five units in the future. People hinted about it"*. However, the Permit units started to expand again after new circumstances. Mills (2003) considered that stories that are tied into ongoing sensemaking of a current situation provide an aura of accuracy. Hence, stories such as the story of downsizing were tightly constructed and materialized as a producer for sensegiving. This sensegiving by the management were surly deliberate to induce people to leave, the coordinator of the transition process stated that "*any way we have these economic conditions determined by the government that required less expenses so we had to dismiss employees, .. There is nothing to be ashamed of"*. By that, the Transition process itself became an actor to blame when referring to reduction. Furthermore, questions that may appear during change "same or different" mostly raised during such situations that involve a dramatic loss of sense and unfamiliar contexts when sense is elusive (Weick et al. 2005 P 415). In the case of the Migration Board, the unfamiliar context can be extracted from the prevailing situation during the transition process. To make sense of the "comparable tasks" was not an easy mission for many case officers. Furthermore, some of them did not even want to run through the process even though they had a guaranteed position in the organisation.

The management, through its power and sensegiving, were constructing identities in order to create a new image for the organisation. Just like the case for other aspects of sensemaking identities are related to plausibility (Gioia et al. 2000). The management aimed to recruit new blood in the organisation, they got rid of old assistants and case officers, and wanted to establish a resilient organisation to be able to deal with new challenges. They were cleared by that and used sensegiving in order to achieve their plan. The West-Region manager made it clear by saying "*seek out and leave room for those who really want to work here"*. This sensegiving process was clarified by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) who confirmed that it is crucial to link between what organisations are now and what they aim to be. As a result, identities and images have changed between units and positions. During post-crisis era the Permit Units thrive and take the most "important decisions" which make it more desirable to work there. As one case officer at the Call Centre stated, *at the top of the status level now are those who work with permits.* While during crisis, the status was higher for the Asylum units.

As it was stated earlier in this paper, one crucial question is whether the actors in micro-level make sense regardless the context and the boundaries that control them. In other words, are their sensemaking expected because it is already shaped by powerful actors such as mass media and governmental agencies. The change in this context was forced by the crisis in the first place, then by the government which directed the organisation. The management applied the restructure process and micro-actors were not able to control the orders of those who have higher power. Yet, as Weber et al. (2006) claimed, those powerful macro-actors cannot control what happens afterwards. There is a kind of interdependency between macro and micro level. In the organisation, unit managers were calling back their employees to come

back and work temporarily to mitigate the pressure. Reception unit's manager pointed out that they were optimistic in Gothenburg's figures and in how much they should decrease, "*We were a little optimistic in the belief that we have fewer applications and many received other jobs so that many also left*". This comparison between micro-macro level can be also explained by what Czarniawska (2003) pointed out that Intentional action never leads to intended results. However, it can be deduced from this study that is both micro and macro actors affect each other.

Finally, in the context of emotions, what organisational members expect from each other becomes is of great importance. Old case officers who expect a lot from their employer were more disappointed than those who just left the organisation. As it was explained by Berscheid and Ammazzalorso (2003) that the wrong question is "what did I do" whether the right one is "what did you expect". Those who asked the latter question did not face a high level of discrepancy like, for example, the four case officers who have together worked as many as 100 years in the organisation and took for granted that their places are safe there.

Conclusion

This study examines the sensemaking process during organisational crisis. Sensemaking has been discussed from different perspective, i.e. conceptually and prospectively. The concept of the sensemaking argues about its plausibility rather than accuracy, dynamically and variable inside organisations and ability to construct identities. Furthermore, sensemaking was viewed prospectively, i.e. who has greater effect on sensemaking between macro and micro actors and emotions. However, it is hard to study sensemaking since it is tightly related to issues such as feeling, personal experiences and habits, background and other attributes that make it critical to be studied.

We have seen how the Migration board limping behind the current events in its environment. The organization's strategic planning was insufficient regarding their sensegiving as the study stated about how the management were optimistic about their production. One of the tools that might be appropriate for the organisation is to prepare, as weick (1979) described, "just-in-time" strategy instead of looking forward to 2022 or even after that. The management want to build a resilient organisation by changing the structure and retain the "appropriate one" could be a right strategy to consider, however, it might affect the Migration board image as an attractive employer. In this context, crisis might have helped the organisation regarding its staff planning. By that this paper concluded that crisis, even with its enormous negative effects, was seen as an opportunity for the organisation to move forward.

The study shows the power that the micro actors have in the organisations. As the Migration board is a public authority one might assume that the power of the governmental agency will be the dominating one. However, the study pointed out the effect of micro actors' sensemaking on a macro level. The management considered that when the asylum applications were resolved, the need for the workforce will be less, and stated that their plan

is to bring back the old organisation that existed in 2012. However, to go back to the 2014 or 2012 organisation is surly risky in such a turbulent times.

Finally, management in crisis-prone organisations need to take extra consideration for the process of sensemaking. Organisations such as the Migration board are strongly tied with the many political, demographic and other aspects that make the staffing plan hard to conduct. Therefore, it is important to learn from this crisis and to actively deal with sensemaking inside the organisation and to see change as continuous process rather than a periodic one. This was expressed by the general director for the organisation by saying:

"Our constant and greatest challenge is the changing world, both in terms of conflicts but also how other countries act and what agreements are entered into. What we have planned for is changing, and then we need to quickly adjust. We may have to change the entire organization"

(Ribbenvik, SVT 180101)

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