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Making sense through false syntheses: Working with paradoxes in the reorganization of the Swedish police

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how a working group in the Swedish police made sense of their task in the wake of reorganization. It aims to describe how inputs from top management prompted processes of sensemaking within the group, and their subsequent results in responding to latent paradoxes. The police group's work was studied through participant observation, interviews and documents. The findings illustrate how the group made latent paradoxes salient and how they worked with these paradoxes to ultimately make them latent again by what we call “false syntheses”. Through this process, the group achieved its task, but the paradoxes were reproduced, made latent and pushed away to another part of the organization. Thus, sensemaking transforms paradoxes from latent to salient, from macro to micro levels of the organization.

1. Introduction

In any organization, solutions are counteracted by others that are equally legitimate. This gives rise to uncertainty about goals and affects the efficiency of the organization. It is therefore critical to understand how such paradoxes are made sense of in daily work. Reorganizations are initiated to resolve paradoxes, but they may also bring about new tensions that make paradoxes salient (Smith & Lewis, 2011). In this article, we investigate sensemaking of paradoxes in the context of organizational change.

A paradox is broadly defined as “anything inconsistent, or narrowly defined as absurd interrelationships that defy logic” (Fairhurst et al., 2016 p.2). Paradoxes and contradictions display a “pervasive nature” in organizational life (Briscoe, 2016 p.1), and research on paradoxes spans an array of organizational phenomena and analytical levels. One strand of paradox research concerns the observation that paradoxes can be latent in organizations, before surfacing and becoming salient in instances of plurality, scarcity and change (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Following Knight and Paroutis (2016), our study contributes to research on early stages of what the authors call ‘paradox recognition’ in organizational contexts, by analysing how paradoxes are made sense of by organizational practitioners. Adding to, and extending, the perspective of paradox recognition, we specifically analyse how paradoxes can be talked into existence and thereby become salient, but also how sensemaking can contribute to making paradoxes hidden and latent again in

a process that result in what we call a “false synthesis”. By this, our study adds to research that engages with how paradoxes are constructed and dealt with in everyday organizational practice as individuals in an ongoing manner engage with tensions in everyday work (Jarzabkowski & Lê, 2017).

A sensemaking lens specifically focuses how people untangle what seems ambiguous (a central feature of a paradox) into manageable realities where further action is possible (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). Existing literature that have merged sensemaking and paradoxes have historically emphasised how sensemaking is an interactional process by which actors engage with organizational contradictions (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016) and transform latent paradox into salient paradox (Jay, 2013; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Adding to previous conceptualisations of paradox and sensemaking linkages, our study aims to unbox the various ways in which sensemaking is linked to paradox in organizational contexts. More specifically, we suggest that the sensemaking of a paradox does not always make paradox salient in a unidirectional manner, rather – following the discussion by Lüscher and Lewis (2008) – we explore the possibility that sensemaking might also transform and hide paradoxical tensions. To develop this perspective, our analysis is based on processes that we term “salience-making”; “tension-making”; and “latent-making” of paradox. Furthermore, we will show how practitioners who are faced with paradoxes through the aforementioned sensemaking processes can end up with a form of quasi-resolution where a paradox at

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face value is made sense of as resolved, but where this solution entails a “false synthesis” – a paradox that is made latent. Knight and Paroutis (2016) convincingly showed how leaders make latent paradoxical tensions salient for others in the organizational context. Our study of false synthesis evidences how the opposite is also possible: how organizational actors, through sensemaking can transform salient contradictions into latent states for others within the organization.

The purpose of our study is to describe and analyse how paradoxes are transformed through sensemaking processes in practitioners’ daily interactions. In this way, we aim to complement previous studies, which are mostly conceptual, with further empirical basis for the theorization of paradoxes and sensemaking. To meet this objective, we did an in-depth exploration of the efforts of a working group of police employees as they attempted to make sense of their assignment during a reorganization of the Swedish police force. Similar to other reorganizations, this change initiative meant that established practices were being replaced and the responsibilities of personnel were shifting. The ongoing change thus entailed a suitable case to study how paradoxes are dealt with through sensemaking, and how sensemaking transform paradoxes.

1.1. Sensemaking and paradox

As mentioned, a common denominator in the sensemaking and paradox literature is that sensemaking entails a process by which paradoxes are ‘recognized’. Through recognition, a paradox is transformed from a latent state to a salient state. Knight and Paroutis (2016) exemplifies this role of sensemaking in their study of how top-management leaders enabled latent paradoxical tensions to become salient for lower-level managers by providing cues and ‘interpretative contexts’ that shape the recipient managers sensemaking and acknowledgment of paradox. Empirically, the study has similarities with Berglund, Strannegård, and Tillberg’s (2004) study of how paradox was used for sensegiving purposes in a bank merger. In this study it was shown how dominant narratives of “high-tech” and “high-touch” simultaneously were drawn upon by managers who integrated the paradox as a part of their communicative strategy, thus employing paradox to construct and influence future actions. In addition, Jay’s (2013) study of a hybrid organization governed by competing institutional logics discusses latent and salient states of paradox and positions sensemaking as process by which practitioners deal with ambiguity and emergent paradoxical situations. In detail, Jay (2013 p. 153) discuss how incompatible logics of client and public service did not comprise an overt paradox but a latent paradox that “surface” from time to time as ambiguous situations arise. Sensemaking of paradox was triggered in order to resolve tensions through strategies such as oscillating and shifting of logics, reframing, and iteratively creating synthesis. Similar functions of sensemaking was described by Lüscher and Lewis, (2008) in their study of middle managers in which paradoxes identified by organizational actors spurred sensemaking and how middle manager through altering of cognitive frames (i.e. reframing) reached workable perspectives to problems pertaining to change.

These studies posit that paradox both has socially constructed components as well as stemming from external organizational systems and practices. They also identify sensemaking as a mediating process by which actors engage in paradox recognition. In their often-cited “dynamic equilibrium” model of organizing, Smith and Lewis (2011) propose that the difference between latent and salient conditions of a paradox can be found in their ontological status. Either paradoxes are exogenous to practitioners as materially embedded contradictions in organizational systems (i.e. latent paradox) or cognitively and socially constructed and rooted in the experience of involved actors (i.e. salient paradox). This view thus propose that paradoxes are “partially socially constructed” (Abdallah, Denis, & Langley, 2011, p. 335) as it is through simultaneous recognition of paradoxical poles that paradoxes are made salient (Lewis, 2000). While this ontological view allows for

sensemaking to be theorized as a mediating process that transforms latent paradoxes into salient paradoxes (as practitioners notice and pick up cues of latent paradoxes) it nonetheless entails an (unsatisfactorily) eclectic ontological perspective.

Therefore, the scholarly discussion on paradox and sensemaking has mainly focused on paradoxes as an exogenous antecedent of sensemaking while sensemaking has been described as the primary process by which paradoxes are unidirectionally transformed from latent to salient. Furthermore, sensemaking is also often discussed as a process by which paradoxes reactively are coped with and/or worked “through” (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008).

While current research has provided valuable insights into how sensemaking and paradox ontologically can be understood in juxtaposition, a currently underexplored question pertaining to sensemaking of paradox is how sensemaking may produce paradox or transform paradox in other directions than from latent to salient states. Regarding how sensemaking may produce paradox, Lewis, (2000 p. 761), for instance, notes that paradoxes can be “constructed” through sensemaking. “As actors attempt to make sense of an increasingly intricate, ambiguous, and ever-changing world, they frequently simplify reality into polarized either/or distinctions that conceal complex interrelationships”. Similarly, Allard-Poesi, (2005 p. 184–185) highlights this property of sensemaking in terms of an “undecidability of sensemaking” wherein every determination of meaning also implies its self-negation. Essentially, “to write or say something implies placing in the margins or excluding a supplementary meaning that will always contaminate and corrupt the privileged one”. As such, attempts to stabilize an over-determined situation through sensemaking inevitably involves simplifications that might obscure underlying contradictions (see also Weick, 1995). Based on Lewis (2000) work, Lüscher, Lewis, and Ingram (2006) as well as Fairhurst et al. (2016) discuss this in terms of how sensemaking might contribute to “vicious cycles” which are produced when individuals react to paradox by defensive responses such as downplaying alternatives, and keeping paradoxical poles separate in time or space. Through such processes, paradox can be made sense of in a short term through the construction of internally consistent (but biased) outlooks on issues, while fundamental issues are effectively hidden or ignored as individuals strive for one-sided but plausible working solutions. Using a dialectical vocabulary, the example presented above posits that sensemaking does not contribute to “synthesis” or transcendence of paradoxical tensions through mindful provision of a third option that resolves tensions between paradoxical poles, but rather to separation of the poles that constitute paradox as contradictions are kept separate and displaced (see Abdallah et al., 2011).

2. Methods

To investigate how practitioners work with paradoxes, we have chosen a single case study in an organization characterized by a major reorganization because periods of reorganization are especially prone to experiencing paradoxes (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Lewis, 2000). The explicit aims of the chosen organization virtually entail a rephrasing of the “organizing paradox” (Lawrence & Lorch, 1967); the Swedish police are expected to change in two opposing directions, increasing *both* the level of standardization and uniformity throughout the whole country, as well as flexibility and “closeness”/proximity to citizens (SOU, 2012:13). The new organization thus plans for national standards at the same time as it propagates more flexibility and local sovereignty.

2.1. Case description

As a case of working with paradoxes, we expected that the implementation process of said reorganization would mean considerable engagement with conflicting courses of action. The working group studied was given the task of investigating and providing suggestions

regarding the design of the roles and responsibilities of police shift commanders (SC) in the future North Region. A unique aspect of this particular region is the geographical remoteness of the local police areas. The region covers more than 50% of Sweden's surface, an area roughly the size of Great Britain, resulting in problems concerning police coverage, response time and services, as well as creating the challenge of integrating human resources since a large number of officers are widely dispersed.

In 2010, a parliamentary committee was given the task of analysing a possible restructuring of the Swedish police in order to gain greater consistency, quality, flexibility, efficiency and proximity to citizens. The Committee proposed a reorganization in which the police would merge the National Police Board, a forensic laboratory and 21 local (and relatively sovereign) police agencies into a single agency operating under a national police commissioner (SOU, 2012:13). The new organization was formally launched 1 January 2015.

At regional level, a large part of the work of police reorganization was implemented through temporary regional “change offices” and work groups. The former was responsible for placing employees in the new organization and for supporting the structural changes. The temporary work groups' tasks were allocated centrally. We followed the work of the internal mission directive “NO10, Shift Commanders' Role”. Their aim was to investigate and give suggestions for the design of the SC role in one region. The SC role was a key issue in the reorganization, with implications for multiple functions.

SCs are part of what the Swedish police call external command (leading in the field), as opposed to internal command (managing the internal organization). A number of directives were given to the working group. First, the directive postulated that SCs must be based in a local police area. This put them firmly under the command of local police chief and they could not become a group of specialists in a given region (as was the case in one of the previous agencies). Second, the SCs were to be given extended authority concerning the commencement of preliminary investigations. This had consequences for required competence and training of SCs. Third, SCs should be stationed in a local police area on a round-the-clock basis, which demanded a certain number of SCs to cover a given local police area. Finally, the group was given the task to make the SC role as an employer clear. While having the responsibility for operative leadership, their administrative tasks should be kept to a minimum. These manager responsibilities should instead fall upon another leadership function.

The members of the working group represented different interests, backgrounds, levels and experiences. In addition, union and work safety organizations were represented. In consequence, the SC group consisted of members from all the four previous agencies, and they lacked a common framework for how they would relate to their mission. Corresponding SC groups were implemented in all of Sweden's seven police regions. However, the region investigated was the first to present a proposal and therefore became a model used for the other groups.

2.2. Data collection

Our study is based on observations, interviews, and analysis of documents related to the five-month long work process of the working group in the shift commanders' role (henceforth; the SC group). Observations were carried out mainly in three group meetings that took place at the beginning, middle and end of the group's assignment. Meetings were either half day or full day and the study covers approximately 26 h of observations. These observations were logged through field notes and a few context photos (Spradley, 1980). Complementing the field notes, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all members of the SC group (a total of 6 individuals), as well as with interviewees from a regional change secretariat (4 interviews) that oversaw the group's process and tasks. Interviews varied in length from 50 to 90 min and included themes such as current challenges in understanding the task and translating it to operational suggestions. The

interviews with the group members served the purpose of complementing the insights gained from the observations by collecting the individual view points on the topics discussed during and between the meetings, and the sensemaking process related to the task. The interviews with the secretariat provided insights about the process that led up to the task, the task itself, and the expected outcome.

Finally, the documents studied included three types of documents in directives, work group documentation, and group output. Specifically, we had access to the initial directives for the work group produced by central police management and policies related to the overarching reorganization which was of relevance for the work group. In regards of group documentation, this included email exchanges between group members (as we were added on copy) and the material shared in the group between meetings, such as meeting agendas, minutes (notes) and various attachments such as a PowerPoint presentation, and memorandums. Finally, documents related to the groups output were various draft versions of the report produced by the group for others to take part of, as well as attachments added to the report (competency profiles and maps). These type of documents were integral for familiarizing us with the group and their assignment provided us with an overview of how the group organized work tasks internally. Documents also aided in analysing how the group dealt with issues. For instance, agendas could give us indications of when issues first appeared or were removed, minutes indicated when issues were talked about at meetings and with several versions of draft reports we could follow how issues would transform during the process (Table 1).

Table 1
Empirical sources.

Observations	Description	Duration
Group conference 1st meeting ^a	Start-up of the project group half day	≈ 3 h
Group conference 1st meeting ^a	Start-up of the project group half day	≈ 3 h
Group conference 1st meeting ^a	Start-up meeting whole day	≈ 8 h
Group conference 3rd meeting	Meeting in the middle of the process	≈ 4 h
Group conference 5th meeting	Last meeting of the SC project group	≈ 8 h
26 h		
Interviews		
SC project manager	Strategic police manager	47 min
SC group member	Shift commander/Union rep	60 min
SC group member	Shift commander	50 min
SC group member	Strategic police manager	67 min
SC group member	Shift commander/Safety rep	93 min
SC group member	Group manager	73 min
Regional change secretariat	Controller 1	50 min
Regional change secretariat	Controller 2	43 min
Regional change secretariat	Operations developer	61 min
Regional change secretariat	Police supervisor and regional coordinator	45 min
9,8 h		
Documents		
Committee directive for SC group		2 pages
Decision on the main features of the new police		51 pages
Detailed decision on operative policing		77 pages
Meeting invitations and agendas (5)		15 pages
Draft competency profile SC and GM		2 pages
Draft requirements profile SC and GM		2 pages
Draft of SC report		10 pages
Draft 2 of SC report		12 pages
Final report SC		27 pages
Power Point presentation SC for the committee		15 slides
Emails		10 pages (approx.)

^a The first group conference was observed simultaneously by three observers. This was done in order to fine-tune observation protocols and enhance inter-observer reliability.

2.3. Analysis

The analysis was based on an abductive approach where we worked with codes and categories to form a processual theoretical account of the group's work that unfolded over multiple consecutive meetings. In this process of interpreting empirical material, we utilized vocabularies from sensemaking and paradox literature in the sense that we paid special interest to episodes of confusion, ambiguity and conflict (Weick, 1995). Therefore, the analysis is best described as abductive. As stated by Lewis (2000:760), abduction is suitable for analysis of interrelated elements whose concurrent co-existence may seem absurd. We set out to examine our data through noting the disruptions that called for sensemaking concerning the conflict between standardization and flexibility in the reorganization as described above (c.f. Weick, 1995). Field notes, interviews and documents were analysed by open coding using categorisation software (NVivo 10). This produced a first impression of how the project team mobilized explanations and understandings in relation to the competing requirements that they identified. Working abductively, we continuously developed our sensemaking analysis by collecting data and applying theoretical readings of the material. The above-mentioned theoretical tools and concepts were used in a three-step analysis.

First, we analysed the situations and contexts that called for processes of sensemaking/sense-giving in the SC group. This involved a first-order analysis of the signals (events, developments, control information) that was characterized by ambiguities, conflict, confusion or different possible solutions. This step of the analysis aimed at describing how the group's sensemaking was called upon in relation to its task. Once the conflicts were categorised, we did a second order analysis identifying the poles of paradoxical tensions, resulting in three main paradoxes that the group had to address in their work. This work also came to show how each pole of the paradoxes either strived to standardise the organization or strived to become more flexible, making the overarching organizing paradox of standardization and flexibility visible in all our levels of coding (see Table 2 in findings). Second, we turned to the process of working with the paradoxes that we identified in the prior step. This entailed the considerations facing the group during the establishment of meaning in relation to paradox. This involved a second-order analysis of the frames of reference and options that were mobilized for the establishment of meaning. Particular attention was paid to lines of argument, choices and the options formulated in those choices. This step came to consist of three main stages of working with paradox. The result of this process is summarized in Table 3 and Fig. 1 in the findings section. In the third and final step, we did an in-depth processual analysis of each of the identified paradoxes using the vocabulary from step one and two, specifically examining changes in the discussions about identified conflict areas. Here we use quotes from observations and interviews to illustrate the theoretical categories and to describe the paradoxes more in detail.

Table 2
Identified paradoxes.

Process of analysis	Pole 1	Relation	Pole 2	
<i>Initial coding: Conflicts and ambiguities</i>	GM mandate	↔	SC mandate	
	Directive – one regional/national model	↔	Local differences	
	Directive: Fewer middle managers	↔	Current middle manager responsibilities	
	Future organization	↔	Present organization	
	Career opportunities	↔	Proximity to co-workers	
	Specialist competences	↔	Local knowledge	
	Number of SCs (directive)	↔	SC geographical “coverage”	
	Police operative procedures in cities	↔	Police operative procedures in rural areas	
	<i>Second order codes: Identified paradoxes</i>	Internal command: Employer role	∨	External command: Leader role
		Specialists: Region based	∨	Generalists: Integrated locally
Urban policing: National uniformity		∨	Rural policing: Local exceptions	
<i>Third order codes: Overarching (organizing) paradox</i>	Standardization	∨	Flexibility	

3. Findings

The findings are separated in three sections, each corresponding to an analytical step described in the method, followed by a description of the vocabulary that details the process each paradox underwent. Finally, we use these vocabularies to make a description with empirical examples of said vocabulary.

3.1. Identifying the paradoxes

Following the first step of the analysis, we identified and coded the issues during meetings and in interviews that signalled ambiguities, conflict, confusion or different possible solutions. This coding resulted in eight central “conflicts” that called for sensemaking in the group and to which the group devoted most of their attention. These conflicts are marked with “↔” in Table 2. The second step of analysis was to group these conflicts around what we as researchers identified as paradoxes. Three paradoxes were identified, marked with the logic symbol “∨” for a paradox relation in the table.

Table 2 also shows how we analysed the conflicts and paradoxes belonging to two main poles, which were central to the practical conflicts that arose. Pole 1 concerns directives and orders that concerns the new organization and that calls for national uniformity in an organization with previous far-reaching local sovereignty. Pole 2, on the other hand, mostly concerns current and local ways of working, adapted to special circumstances in the different counties. Hence, we concluded that conflicts and paradoxes identified in this analysis are triggered and resulting from the overarching organization paradox inherent in the organizational change; that the police should simultaneously increase both standardization and flexibility.

3.2. Identifying the processes

In each of the identified paradoxes we found a process of *making the paradox salient*; that is, going from a state of unawareness to awareness of a dilemma. We call this process “salience-making”. As stated earlier, organizational change can have the effect of surfacing latent paradoxes (Smith & Lewis, 2011), but had the poles been kept apart the paradox would not have been talked into existence. In our case, this surfacing was done through presentation of differences in ways of working between the counties (spatial difference) and also by highlighting differences between the present state of the organization and its future state (temporal state). The paradox was also made salient through visualization, particularly by the drawing of maps on a whiteboard. Lastly, salience-making came about through disagreements within the group in cases where some had proposed solutions felt to be unacceptable by another group member. The first process of sensemaking is thus one of realising there are poles and when these meet, a paradox is talked and enacted into existence.

The second stage of the process was the framing of the paradox, in

Table 3
Data structure displaying the sensemaking process of paradoxes.

Paradoxes	Saliency-making	Tension-making	Latent-making
<i>Internal √ External</i>	Differences in role and mandate in different counties in present organization Discrepancies between future state and present own function (who will do my job?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whiteboard: presenting the present organization and differences between counties ○ Whiteboard: laying out the future tasks of respective functions ○ “Entrenched behind a desk” imagery ○ Leading outside – leading inside ○ Trying different solutions, imagining consequences ○ Trying different terms and words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Split function between SC and GM ○ Leader role vs. employer role ○ Mandatory time “on the field” for GM and SC
<i>Specialist √ Generalist</i>	Difference in ways of working in different counties in present organization Disagreement within the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attributing personal experiences of rural policing ○ Construction of rural policing as different from urban ○ Building argument against central organization/south ○ Imagining the receiver; impressing top management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Siding with generalist but with the introduction of a forum for SCs ○ Forum instead of group ○ Semi-formality; no manager ○ “Action radius” of SC ○ Argument for more SCs than the directive specifies ○ Distance leadership
<i>Urban √ Rural</i>	Directive: Decrease the number of SCs Maps and geographical distances Drawings of number of SCs and maps on whiteboard		

which there is also a build-up of *tension* as the opposite elements that seem logical in isolation are juxtaposed. We call this stage of the process *tension-making*. This is reminiscent to the polarization described by Lewis (2000). Tension was intensified through envisioning future states, such as the “entrenched behind a desk” imagery. Members also envisioned the receiver – the top management of the organization and how they would reason and what solutions they would find acceptable or unacceptable. Furthermore, using the whiteboard to plot the present and future organization and the SCs’ and GMs’ functions, served to highlight dilemmas with no obvious solution – a process we call labelling. The members also contributed personal experiences of rural policing to show the impracticality of certain suggestions.

The third and final stage was when the group agreed on a proposed solution. In all of the cases, this also meant accepting a solution that seemed *plausible*. As pointed out by Weick (1995, 2010) and Cornelissen, Mantere, and Vaara (2014), sensemaking tends to reduce complexity by accepting plausible explanations. We suggest that the amount of tension in the previous stage is crucial to this stage, which we label *latent-making*. Our data indicates that once a plausible solution was proposed, the group closed its discussion of the problem and did not return to the issue. There was also significant relief in the group once a plausible solution was aired. Pressed for time, they also engaged in some “mind-guarding” of proposed solutions (Janis, 1972). If a group member questioned previously agreed solutions he or she was ignored or mocked, as shown in the next section in the findings. Table 3 summarizes our findings and shows how the group worked with identified paradoxes.

The result of the group’s work on each of these paradoxes can be described as hiding the paradox (again), rather than resolving it. By adapting these plausible and “mind-guarded” solutions to the problems they addressed, the result is something we suggest should be labelled

false syntheses since they do not resolve the paradox. Rather, the proposed solution is the same or similar paradox re-packaged as a ready-made solution that is transferred to another part of the organization. These parts of the organization then become responsible of combining the poles again, and putting the latent paradox solution into practice. In the practical work of SCs and GMs, the paradox is likely to surface again since it is an integrated part of the everyday work (i.e. specialist vs generalist is a matter of utilization of knowledge). Therefore, we have termed the solution as “false”. Fig. 1 details the process model by which paradoxes are talked into existence and made salient through a process of sensemaking, and return to latent with the aid of false syntheses.

Corresponding to the observations in the sensemaking literature (e.g. Weick, 1995) it is important to note that the sensemaking process we identified was not isolated stages with clear boundaries and hence not isolated to one specific meeting, but rather dispersed over several consecutive meetings. That is, issues re-emerged and became repeatedly discussed dynamically across meetings. However, there was an emphasis on saliency-making in the first meetings, and a focus on latent-making towards the finalization of the group’s suggestion as time pressures built up.

3.3. Describing the work with paradoxes

In this final section of the findings, we describe the work with the paradoxes identified with the aid of the process vocabulary constructed in the previous sections. For each of the paradoxes, the process of saliency-making, tension-making and latent-making is described with the aid of empirical examples.

3.3.1. External or internal command?

The first of the three paradoxes concerned a tension between the

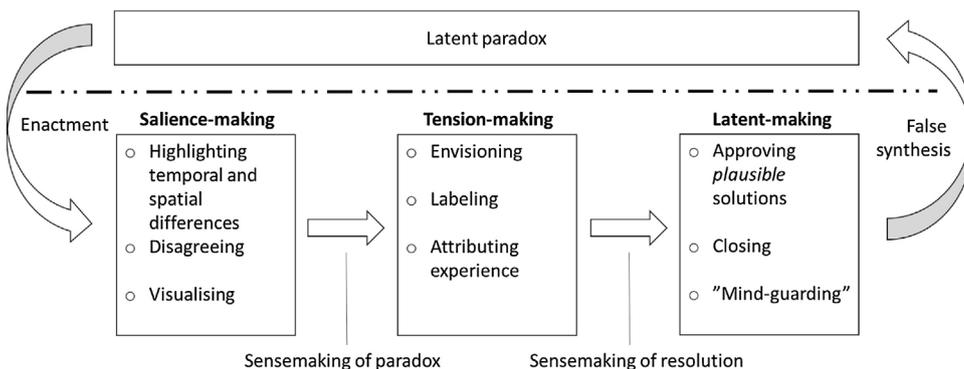


Fig. 1. False synthesis of paradoxes framework.

SCs' function as external command with responsibility for leadership on the field and their function as internal command with administrative responsibilities. This paradox concerned the organizational change leading to a renegotiated delegation of authority and separation of external management (management of police work on the field) from internal management (the economic management and employer's responsibility).

3.3.1.1. Salience-making. Throughout the meetings, a recurring issue concerned the demarcation of SCs' mandate and responsibilities towards other functions, particularly the GMs and the duty officer. The mission directive hinted that a refinement of these functions would be desirable, but that the group be given the task to work out this refinement in detail. Initially, the SC group presented various ways in which these boundaries were drawn in the different counties in the current (old) organization. At the first meeting, there was therefore a need to reach common ground on how to differentiate employer responsibilities from leader responsibilities and to which roles, for example, they wished to assign tasks such as rehabilitation, salary negotiations and performance appraisals. Hence, triggers for this sensemaking process became the directive and the perceived differences between the group members' current ways of defining the SC role. The SCs also had different mandates and ways of working in different counties. Another clear trigger for this process was the realisation that some group members' function or part function would disappear. This was particularly true for the indirect leadership function:

Jim: I feel like this is [a description of] a group manager when I read this document.

Linda: Yes, I am the one pulling the strings. But my job will disappear.

Jim: [Irony] Yeah, that's fantastic (laughter). Your responsibilities will have to be moved upwards and downwards.

(Field notes, 1st meeting)

3.3.1.2. Tension-making. At the start of the project, much of the time was devoted to presentations of current ways of working and drawing maps on the whiteboard. After this, the future state of the organization was added. In these discussions, GMs came to be viewed as managers with formal responsibilities whose administrative function hinder them from performing the leadership duty. Conversely, the group saw the SCs as people who had daily contact with police officers and who were better equipped to assume the role as leaders. Problems discussed in this demarcation included the difficulties for both GMs and SCs in exercising a direct leadership over police personnel, since administrative management tasks run the risk of "entrenching the leader behind a desk" (Interview, "Linda"). It was felt that being "behind a desk" would mean significant distance from everyday organizational life and the police's external activities.

He [the manager] has no idea, even if he thinks he has. But he hasn't. And that creates distrust. We are given individual salary levels and... How can you give feedback on anything if you've never been out working?

(Interview, "Fredrik")

In this discussion, it was noted that an important factor for both SCs and GMs was "staff knowledge" and the assumption that such knowledge comes through spending time in external daily operations. Different meanings and logics were used to argue the details of new roles that were giving rise to ambiguities in the group's work. One such logic was that SCs should be given employer responsibilities because it is necessary in their role as leaders. An alternative line of argument was that GMs should be given employer responsibility as demanded by their

role as formal managers.

3.3.1.3. Latent-making. The discussions resulted in a division between internal command and external command, where internal command was given the role of employers and external command was given the role of leaders in the field. The group agreed very early in the process that the SCs should be given the leader role and the GMs should be given the employer role.

The idea of the importance of both SCs and GMs to "be out there" was given great weight. In the finalised report, the group expressed the need to specify the amount of active duty for both these management functions. It was determined that the ratio should be two thirds of working hours for the SCs and one third for the GM.

Jim: We were in an early agreement to split these roles [SC and GM]. That's good.

Fredrik: Then there are also two ways to make a career. Good.

Linda: I was worried that GMs wouldn't work in the field. They just have to when we do this split. But it's good that we write that they have to be out 1/3 of the time.

(Field notes, 5th meeting)

It was argued that this suggestion would overcome the difficulty presented by the refinement of the roles of managers and leaders, where GMs would assume more of the administrative tasks previously bestowed upon SCs. As a consequence, the group was thus compelled to define the new role of the GM to almost as large an extent as the SC. However, by stating a ratio, they symbolically indicated that the GMs should be on the field to some extent. Whether this ratio would be the case given their responsibilities was highly uncertain, but naming the ratio avoided concerns and made the paradox latent. The group was thus also compelled to define the new role of the GM to almost as large an extent as the SC. There were critical voices along the way, but they were in this phase "mind guarded" by ignoring concerns voiced by group members, for example:

Emma: Have we really left every stone unturned? Are there any other options? Than what we suggest, splitting SC and GM, is that all we are bringing to the table?

Jim: The question is settled. We've done that already.

(Moving on to next issue)

(Field notes, 5th meeting)

In the example above, the latent-making of the paradox focused upon reaching a plausible enough solution to temporarily overcome problems faced by the group regarding how to address the interface between GMs and SCs. To achieve this, the group had to restrain from in depth analysis of their proposed solution (as evidenced by Jim in the quote).

3.3.2. Specialists or generalists?

The second identified paradox was whether SCs should constitute a specialised function with their own arenas, development opportunities and a specific manager, or whether they should be integrated with police officers in the daily intervention operations and thus constitute a function in the line organization. This paradox concerned the degree of specialization.

3.3.2.1. Salience-making. The trigger for this sensemaking process was the difference between the present organization's ways of working in the counties, and a strong will from one of the members (Paul) to maintain the status quo in one of them. In this county, the SCs had their own group with an assigned manager and they saw it as important to keep this arrangement. Thus, this disagreement was triggering a sensemaking process.

3.3.2.2. Tension-making. One strong counter argument was that there would be less friction concerning career possibilities and salary negotiations if the SCs were not given a special career track separate from other police officers.

It's been sort of a trend within the police, that you create these special groups... If you belong to the bigger group, there are fewer career opportunities and lower salaries... It's a constant struggle to get things out to the line and feel that they belong there.

(Interview, "Linda")

The directive to streamline the SC role and the discussion of boundaries between GM and SC subsequently led to a discussion on whether the SC role can be regarded as a specialist or a generalist one. This also created a predicament as to whether SCs should be organized locally or regionally; integrated in daily operations (albeit as a leader function) or constituting a group of its own on a regional level. As the role was streamlined towards leadership rather than management, and thereby specialised to a greater extent than before, questions arose around issues of competence development, learning opportunities and collegiality. It was felt that organizing the SCs in a regional group with a GM of their own would satisfy some of these needs. In contrast, as part of the normal line of operations the SCs would be closer to employees and organized below a GM managing both SCs and police officers.

3.3.2.3. Latent-making. The final decision of the group was that the SCs should be part of normal daily operations. It was based on arguments about standardization and avoiding the establishment of specialist groups within the police. However, the group's decision was also to include a suggestion to establish semi-formal networks and forums for SCs to meet and learn from each other. Avoiding the word "group" was paramount in handling this paradox for the participants in the discussion and thereby making the paradox latent for others in the organization:

Fredrik: Can we write something else? Something more careful so they won't back down in the leadership like they did with the dog-group? How would you like to phrase it to be happy? (To Paul)

Paul: It has to be clear that there will be forums for SCs. We need that.

Jim: I agree, 100%.

Emma: Not write "group", then?

(Body language relaxing in the group, shift sitting positions and move around)

Jim: We stick to the function.

(Field notes, 5th meeting)

As long as these "forums" did not have a formal ring to them, and lacked an appointed manager, the SC group members were able to move on. This solution was also made latent and "mind-guarded" against objections with (friendly) mockery:

Jim: We are stuck on details. And we are pressed for time. We have to produce some text.

Arnold: What should the SC do?

Jim: You (*turning to Paul*) might have some concerns. They are quite predictable, but be my guest (irony, laughter).

(Field notes, 5th meeting)

The mockery indicated that there would be foreseeable possible objections, but made fun of those objections and thus affording such objections less power in the discussion – making the paradox they were associated with latent.

3.3.3. Urban or rural policing?

The third paradox concerned eventual deviations from national efforts to reform the SC role that the group saw as relevant based on geography, demographics and differences in approach between urban and rural areas.

3.3.3.1. Salience-making. Functioning as triggers for this sensemaking process was the directive for the group to decrease the number of SCs by 40%. As the group drew maps and plotted distances, it became apparent that there would be some trouble with leading in rural areas characterized by large geographical distances. In other cases, based on the current ways of working, the introduction of an SC to the area was seen as detrimental.

3.3.3.2. Tension-making. According to the group, the region as a whole needed to depart in some respects from the national guidelines. In addition, local areas of the region needed local deviations and adaptations depending on time and geographical conditions in daily operations.

The directives want the leaders to be present in daily operations? I mean, are you present when you are 140 km away? The situation is over before I get there.

(Interview, "Linda")

National considerations were discussed throughout the process, partly on the basis of the initial directives, but also based on reconciliation and synchronisation with other project groups in the region. The national directives were unanimously felt to be defining for the mission and served as a starting point for solving some of the problems of the SC role. At the same time however, national uniformity was felt to be unattainable in the North Police Region, mostly due to the large geographical areas in the north. National guidelines suitable for policing activities in urban areas presented difficulties for the organization of SCs in areas where population is sparse or varies dramatically depending on the season, such as in mountain tourism centres.

Problems arose concerning issues of proximity to police officers and response times for SCs. However, the distance and response time for an SC did not only concern those whom the SC is supposed to lead, but also in situations where police are involved. Distance also inhibits SCs' ability to navigate and understand local geography, knowledge of criminally active individuals and local field expertise.

A complicating circumstance in the group's work was the realisation that while the previous counties worked rather similarly to each other, the local differences within a county were much greater. Crime prevalence, local jurisdictions and the nature of work (planned or reactive) were vastly different between urban and rural areas. The role of SCs in searches for missing people and mountain rescues was also very different and called for local solutions and deviations from national directives.

3.3.3.3. Latent-making. These discussions in the group led to the formulation of a "largest working area" of any given SC.

We are as big a region as all the other six put together. And we had this discussion where we agreed that it is reasonable to have a radius of 100 km for an SC.

(Interview, "Jim")

This was seen as a powerful argument in negotiations with the national directives and a possible way to motivate more SCs than given in the initial suggestion. Showing the distances on a map became a strategy to argue the case before top management for more SCs.

Decreasing the number of SCs was one of the conditions in the national directives. The group therefore also considered how to handle the fact that many towns and areas would be left without SCs in the new organization. A workaround of the geographical problem were

suggestions of *distance leadership*, where SCs would lead operations via technical solutions, which the group settled for through the process of latent making:

Arnold: It's easier to lead from a warm office. The law-book over there, and the investigator over there (shows with hands). Easier than when some trouble-makers start to shake your car in any case.

(Field notes, 5th meeting)

However, there was some disagreement about the viability of distance leadership, which was aired privately during the interviews but not publically at the meetings:

I've seen this at my work. Someone needs new shoes or gloves and it needs to get fixed on the spot. It wouldn't work with distance leadership... Leading the work is not only telling people what to do, but also greasing the wheels. And if a fire starts you should be there.

(Interview, "Fredrik")

This is another example of how plausible proposed solutions offer a possibility to construct sense out of paradoxical and confusing situation, but at the cost of hiding relevant objections that would threaten and destabilize the situation. In this way, a plausible enough solution relieves tension in the short turn as it offers a way out of a problematic situation but retains the paradox in the long run, keeping it hidden from the members of the group, and the recipients of the proposed solution.

4. Discussion

With the case study as a basis, we add empirically to previous conceptual knowledge about the sensemaking of paradoxes by introducing a processual framework (Fig. 1) that describes the sensemaking processes that foregrounds the construction of "false synthesis" in our case. The case described is illustrative of how a working group within a police organization talked paradoxes into existence when poles inherent to their mission were brought to light, which in turn required delicate discussions on how to proceed in order to come up with a feasible solution to their mission. We describe this as a process of sensemaking where the paradox become salient and eventually latent, through salience-making, tension-making and latent-making over the course of five months and a series of meetings. In the following, we discuss our findings in relation to previous literature.

4.1. The process of making sense of paradoxes

We described sensemaking of paradox in terms of a salience-making, tension-making and latent-making process that the workgroup went through during approximately five months. *Salience-making* refers to the initial process by which a dissonance or inconsistency is enacted and talked into existence through the views of the participants and thereby recognized as paradoxical. Within the sensemaking and paradox literatures, this is consistent with "framing" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999) "surfacing" (Jay, 2013) or "accepting" paradox (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; see also Lewis, 2011; Smith & Tushman, 2005). The notion of salience making suggests that paradoxes in a sense are constructed when incongruent poles or competing logics (see Jay, 2013) meet in time and space. When groups or organizations are given a mission and task to resolve within a timeframe, in particular if the participants have different features (e.g. geographically, competence-wise or interests), poles are likely to meet.

Once made salient, a second part of the process, *tension-making*, followed where the paradox build-up of tension in the group, as the opposite poles (that might seem logical in isolation) are juxtaposed and increasingly appears mutually exclusive once their characteristics become visible (Luscher et al., 2006). Similarly to previous research, our study indicate that it is only after being made salient that tensions inherent within a paradox are rendered visible in situ, thus allowing the

paradox to be labelled. In our findings, this part of paradox sense-making was perturbed, as the group had to cope with unresolved tensions and dissonances. We found that such uncertainty created incentives for a defensive response (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013) to the paradox in which the SC group "resolved" their problems by approving solutions, such as breaking down or changing the shape of the confronting paradox so that at face value it would seem (plausibly) resolved – resulting in a false synthesis. This, we labelled a process of *latent-making* by which paradoxes are hidden.

The notion of latent-making can be argued to be counter-intuitive (and indeed paradoxical in itself), as it implies that paradox, through active engagement by organizational actors, can be made invisible for those same actors. For example, in relation to the groups work with tensions between external and internal command as well as urban and rural policing, a sensemaking strategy was to not voice concerns, thereby avoiding destabilizing information. Likewise, in their work with the tension between specialist or generalist management, a key issue in order to make the paradox latent was to avoid the word "group" – even though the solution proposed was a "group" in every other aspect but the name. In this way, group members would coordinate to keep paradoxical tensions latent from themselves and others. To borrow a concept from Jarzabkowski and Lê (2017), we view latency-making as an 'interactional dynamic' – a way to describe how paradoxical conditions are coped with in the moment but at the cost of retaining, repackaging and perhaps even reinforcing the tension on long term.

As an empirically emergent phenomenon, latency-making has several theoretical implications: First, our study shows how actors involved in latent-making can construct a paradox as latent for other individuals in the organizational context who in this sense become recipients of a latent-made paradox. Knight and Paroutis (2016) showed how an important dimension of managerial work entailed salience-making of paradox for others such as subordinates in the organizational context. In relation to this, our study opens up for the possibility that organizational actors may also engage in the opposite process of making salient paradox invisible for others through latent making wherein profound contradictions are suppressed. This would imply that paradoxes can move vertically as well as horizontally through organizations, iteratively being operationalised and "falsely synthesised" by various groups with the result of a contradiction that is persistent over time and space. In this way, latent-making involves active engagement and sensemaking by which paradoxical poles are separated by being actively ignored, avoided and not put simultaneously into practice by individuals enacting a task. This opens up for the possibility that a latent paradox (or rather conflicting poles) can be passed on in words that sound reasonable and plausible. A latent paradox can therefore be lingual, in the form of an order or a directive, which sounds reasonable and not paradoxical, however, the paradox surfaces when practically engaged and situationally enacted (Weick, 1995).

Second, the question can also be raised if salience-making can lead to a situation in which the same actors who engage in sensemaking of paradox over time become unaware of a salient paradox. With a definition of latency as a dormant condition of paradox which can be the result of ignoring of tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011), there is at least a theoretical possibility that actors in groups may ignore experience and thus exercise 'forgetfulness' (see Brunsson, 2006; Ciuk & Kostera 2010). Sensemaking entails working towards plausible solutions that ultimately allow for continued action in situated practice (c.f. Weick, 1995), something which opens up for several types of dysfunctional information processing. Previously described examples of these type of deceptive processes are for instance the notion of "mind guarding" (Janis, 1972) wherein potentially available information is delimited in order to secure group cohesiveness. Other examples entails group "process losses" where information held by individuals in a group nonetheless may be out of reach for the collective as the group actively ignore or suppress cues from the environment in order to reach consensus (West, 2012; see also Weick et al., 1993). This indicate that

actors, or at least groups of actors, may effectively hide paradox and make them latent when they socially construct paradoxes as resolved, in, for example, writing. By stating that paradoxes are made and kept latent through processes of sensemaking we can identify similarities between our study and studies suggesting that sensemaking might contribute to marginalization and censoring of meaning (Whittle, Mueller, Gilchrist, & Lenney, 2016). This view departs from the ontological perspective that latent paradoxes are exogenous or material phenomena rooted in organizational systems. Our study indicates that with a sensemaking viewpoint as a basis, paradoxes can be viewed as fully socially constructed rather than materially embedded within organizational systems.

4.2. False synthesis

The idea of false synthesis has resemblances to what Abdallah et al. (2011 p. 345) with reference to Cyert and March (1963) calls “quasi resolution of conflict”. This takes place when organizations build consensus and preserve harmony when encountering divergent goals. In our case, false synthesis denotes the process by which paradoxes faced by the working group were packaged as resolved but in practice transformed in state. False synthesis is thus a process where responses to paradoxes include false solutions that are not really synthesised (resolved) in the way described by, for example, Gaim and Wählin (2016). The conceptualization of false synthesis (downplaying alternatives, and keeping paradoxical poles separate in time or space) does not easily fit into the account of responses to paradoxes provided by Jarzabkowski’s et al. (2013). The answer to the question of whether the responses are active or defensive seems to be that there is a mix of one or more responses. For example, the response to the external-internal command paradox is both a “splitting” and a “confrontation” response. On a practical level, our analysis indicates that a mixed-message at the directive level of a planned change may be equally mixed after being operationalised at more concrete levels of an organization.

Working from the strategies for sensemaking described above, where contradictions are suppressed through the production of false synthesis, can have short-term advantages for the involved practitioners such as retained group cohesion and the establishment of common ground. Specifically, our findings illustrate how interaction between team members trying to make sense of a paradox led a situation where prevailing contradictions were underemphasised. In a long-term perspective, the solutions produced by the group ultimately came to include the tensions of the original paradox. Hence, if there is a paradox at play and the fall-back approach for making sense of said paradox is geared towards reaching plausible solutions and workable uncertainties, a likely outcome is the risk of reproducing paradox.

4.3. Conclusions

In this article, we have followed a working group in the Swedish police and their struggles to make sense of paradoxes in the context of ongoing organizational change. Through this approach we set out to build knowledge about how practitioners construct and transform paradox through their sensemaking efforts. The core contributions of the article are twofold:

First, the article explored how paradoxes through sensemaking intricately are transformed from latent to salient states and vice versa. We described a process model in which we detail three processes labelled salience-making, tension-making and latent-making to describe how paradoxes are talked into existence and later on hidden or made latent as they were constructed as plausibly resolved. These processes were related to current theorizing in the paradox literature and drawing upon sensemaking and the idea of plausible solutions (Weick, 1995), as well as the groupthink literature (Janis, 1972) we specifically suggest the theoretical possibility that latency can be achieved even though a paradox is known to a group.

Second, the article details an empirically emergent phenomena that is the result of latent making which we labelled “false synthesis”. The notion of false synthesis was discussed in relation to current theorizing on paradox responses. We add to this literature by describing a phenomena through which paradoxes at face value are resolved by groups of practitioners, but where contradictions nonetheless remain and are likely to create renewed contradictions in the future work of the police leaders and officers. While the studied group, through their sense-making approach, felt they succeeded in their mission, the present study demonstrates that the paradoxes the group initially encountered were worked with to become latent.

The two contributions of the article both merit further research. First, the process model presented in the article is empirically grounded in the study of one working group within a public sector organization, and to and to confirm the framework we urge other researchers to examine whether similar processes can be found in other settings. Second, our study was based on a sample consisting of one working group who received a directive, worked with paradoxes inherent in the mission, and consequently ended up with a “false synthesis”. With this empirical focus, the question of how false synthesis can move through organizations between multiple levels and/or groups of practitioners therefore falls outside the immediate scope of the study. A broader approach where directives, ideas and activities are followed over time and across settings, for instance through shadowing (see Czarniawska, 2007) could target this proposed movement of paradox in the form of false synthesis.

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