The reorganisation of the Swedish Police with a focus on the police command centres

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Abstract

The underlying driving force in the reorganisation of the Swedish Police was the demand to have a more effective and efficient police service. The directive to the committee set up to investigate the need for a reorganisation focused on whether the existing organisation was an obstacle in achieving a well-functioning police service. However, there is strong research support for that it was (and still are) other factors that cause the main problems. As a result of this, therefore, it is natural not to expect any huge improvements purely as a result of a major police reorganisation. One way of trying to achieve successful change was by influencing the prevailing culture through a restructuring of the management layer, but even after the reorganisation the same individuals remained in higher management positions. Units that worked well were closed down rather than implementing a solution that tried to spread best practice. A cautionary principle had been advocated, but this was not followed in the actual implementation. The new police service is designed as a matrix organisation. Such an organisation contradicts the fundamental purpose of the reorganisation: to have a clearer chain of command and less administration. You can focus on effects of the reorganisation in different ways. The focus of this paper is the police command centres as these are important for many of the police’s core task such as the ability to solve crimes and prevent problems arising.

Keywords: Swedish Police Reorganisation window-dressing

Introduction

In 2015 the Swedish Police service underwent a major reorganisation. It is possible to analyse the effects in different ways. For example:

- Evaluate the impact regarding the police's ability to deal with certain basic tasks, such as the ability to solve crimes.
- Evaluate the impact in specific areas, such as the hinterland of the northern region.
- Evaluate the impact regarding the ability to deal with a specific problem, such as drunk driving.
- Evaluate specific functions, eg regional command centres

In this paper the reorganisation of the Swedish Police is partly analysed from a more general perspective, and partly with a focus on police command centres. An in-depth analysis of the command centres could be interesting because they are important for the ability of the police to deal with local problems, how the police can handle some basic tasks such as solving crime and the police’s ability to deal with general problem phenomena. Police have, for several decades, been subject to centralism. This is also the case with command centres. In the early 00s command centres that had existed in many different areas were centralised to one command centre in each county. Now these have been centralised even further to just seven regional command centres. That centralisations reduce local knowledge about persons and places had, previously, been highlighted as a problem. This was also the case now. Does this argument have relevance or is it mostly a form of resistance against change? This
is a question that will be answered in this paper. In addition, the article will also consider a more general question: What can we expect to be the effects of the Swedish Police reorganisation? The general question is formulated as it is because the analysis takes place relatively near to the change (slightly more than two years).

**Method**

A variety of different evaluations and research studies concerning the Swedish Police have been used as a basis for the topics highlighted in this paper. Empirical data has also been collected specifically for this study. Interviews and participant observations were carried out between March 2016 and March 2017. In total, 83 formal interviews, 5 group interviews and slightly more than 100 informal interviews have been conducted at different hierarchical levels of the Swedish Police in different areas and also with people outside the police (43 interviews). Regarding the choice of interview subjects, a so-called snowball selection was used where I received tips on individuals who would be useful to interview and then they, in turn, gave me new ideas about who to contact. I had a quest to find people who had different ideas about conditions in order to be able to try out various statements against each other and also to interview personnel in different types of areas in Sweden. No template was used in the formal interviews because the aim was to capture as many viewpoints as possible. If the interviewee expressed an opinion concerning the importance of local knowledge, the person had to clarify and give concrete examples of what he or she meant. The aim has been to form an understanding of what type of experience the different assumptions and conclusions were based on. Interviews were written down immediately after the interview and sent to the interviewees for comments.

The work in a command centre in the north of Sweden and in the capital of Sweden, Stockholm, was observed over an afternoon/evening. Participant observations of the interaction between patrols and command centres was done during 22 shifts in a patrol car in Stockholm and by listening to four audio files from other areas of Sweden.

A high degree of triangulation has been done during the data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), to make it possible to contrast different pieces of data to each other. In the analysis previous research was used in combination with the categorisation of empirical data (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2007). The analysis regarding the police control centres in this paper is a short, summarised description of the findings in an extensive report about command centres (see Holgersson, 2017).

**What can we expect to be the effects of the Swedish Police reorganisation?**

The Swedish government appointed a committee which was responsible for:

> “analysing whether the current police organisation is an obstacle to the demands from the government to get higher quality, greater cost efficiency, increased flexibility and significantly improved results by the police” (SOU 2012:13, p. 17)

The reason for forming a committee was that politicians were not satisfied with the performance of the police. If the committee came to the conclusion that the existing organisation was an obstacle in achieving a better functioning police they should put forward a proposal for a new police organisation. This was what happened and the Swedish Police underwent a major reorganisation where 21 police departments formed a national police service on 1 January 2015.
An established approach to addressing problems in an organisation is to analyse what is causing the problems (Goldkuhl & Röstlinger, 1988). The committee's task was, however, only to examine whether the organisation itself was an obstacle to achieving a better result. Research indicates that the cause of the poor performance of the Swedish Police can for the most part be found in other factors (for example Ekman, 1999; Holgersson, 2005; Arnten-Andersson, 2013; Wennström, 2014). It is important to note that because the main reasons for the poor results were not primarily connected to how the organisation was designed, you cannot expect that the reorganisation will have the desired effect in terms of improving the performance of the police. An initial answer to the question about what we can expect to be the effects of the Swedish Police's reorganisation is thus: very limited positive effects.

However, when presented in different contexts the Swedish Police’s major reorganisation has given rise to huge expectations. Research has shown that the purpose of organisational change is often to make organisations more legitimate in the eyes of external stakeholders (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Holgersson, 2005; Alvesson, 2013). An organisational change is rewarding from a legitimacy-building aspect. It is possible to ward off criticism of an organisation by referring to an upcoming reorganisation as a solution to the subject of the criticism. This course of action has been common in this case (for example SR, 2014). References to the police reorganisation have been made in such a way that it was easy to get the impression that the positive effects would occur at the beginning of 2015 when “-the organisational shackles will be removed” (for instance, Altinget, 2014). The Chief of Police expressed before the reorganisation was initiated that positive effects of the new police organisation “will be noticed fairly soon” (see, for example, DT, 2014). When the effect will emerge has then been continually postponed (see, for example, SVT, 2015; DN, 2016; SVT, 2017).

An important objective of the new organisation is to increase its local presence and be able to adapt the work of the police to local needs. Since 1965, when there was a huge reorganisation of the Swedish Police, the overriding development trend has however been towards centralisation... Quite quickly after the 1965 reorganisation there arose a discussion about the need to get closer to citizens as it was felt that the distance to them had increased (Ds Ju 1973:5, page 34). The demand for a local police presence has been expressed more and more (See SOU 1979:6; SOU 1985:62; SOU 2001:87 Länsstyrelsen i Stockholms län (1993) and SOU 2012:13). Despite these obvious repeatedly expressed needs the development of the Swedish Police has in general gone in the opposite direction. The Danish reorganisation of their police resulted in local knowledge and contact between the police and citizens worsening - completely contrary to the very purpose of reform (Balvig, Holmberg & Nielsen, 2011). There are few indications that the effect of the reorganisation of the police would be different in Sweden. In terms of centralisation and the creation of a national police in Sweden there are reasons to refer to organisational researchers Johan Quist and Martin Fransson who, inter alia, examined the effects of this type of organisation change in other Swedish authorities:

"Through a unified concept authorities choose to ignore the cultural and demographic differences within the country, which means that citizens have different needs. The nationalisation of authorities has given the authorities the power to ignore the fact that different conditions may require different solutions. With decentralised responsibility and mandate there existed formerly a greater ability to manage local variation" (Quist and Fransson, 2014, page 70).

The old county divisions have largely been maintained in the new Police service, and are now called Police Districts. As a reason to keep the old county divisions, the committee that established the new police organisation said that this was "not to hamper the work to form the new Police Department" (Polisen, 2014). Instead of 21 county forces there are now though about 30 Police Districts. These have built up supporting functions and appointed officers with the task of coordinating operations and making decisions on certain issues. An additional level compared to the old organisation has been introduced - Police Regions. These regions form a new level of hierarchy between the former county
forces and the Chief of the Police. Just like the Police Districts, the Police Regions have also built up various forms of support functions and executives to coordinate activities. Similar conditions exist at the Local Police Districts that are the level below the Police Districts. Overall, there is much pointing at the reorganisation of the Swedish Police in 2015 has led to an increasing administration. Even as far back as the -90s the assumption that a continued centralisation of the police would result in better productivity was criticised (Sveiby, 1994), but the mantra of the positive effects of new centralisation has persisted despite repeated criticism (See for example. Holgersson 2001; Holgersson, 2005; Holgersson & Knutsson, 2012a).

Moreover, the new police organisation has been designed as a matrix organisation. There are local geographical responsibilities and there are also departments at a national level that have a functional responsibility. Aside from that, a large centrally-based administration has a tendency to generate more administration by itself, it is also so that decision-making in a matrix organization frequently results in discussions on both small and large matters and this may significantly increase an organisation’s administrative costs (Mintzberg, 1993; see also Knight, 1976). The researchers Quist and Fransson pointed at the difficulty of handling goal conflicts in a matrix organisation. Among the problems that Quist and Fransson highlight is the role conflict that employees experience when signals from the hierarchical manager are in conflict with signals from other managers. “Employees are unsure who is in charge and feel that they get squeezed” (Quist & Fransson, 2014, p. 95). This is a problem that has become apparent in the new Police service. The chosen form of organisation can be said to be contrary to the philosophy of the reorganisation, that there should be less administration and more clarity and easier decision-making.

In the current process of change the main force and focus has, to a high degree, resulted in drawing organisation charts and determining where different officials would be placed. The content of the work of the police has been eclipsed. It is hardly surprising given how the basic assignment was formulated. The head of the investigation into the need for a new police organisation stressed on several occasions that a precautionary principle would prevail - that change for the sake of change would not be done, but during the implementation of the new organisation this has not been the case, and the Home Secretary seemed to not even know of this stated precautionary principle (Polistidningen, 2016). Instead of preserving organisational units that worked well in the old organisation and spreading the way that they organised their work to other units, nearly everything has been reorganised. The way that the police have chosen to implement the new organisation can mostly be defined as BPR (Business Process Reengineering), ie a total restructuring, where the old is thrown out and everything is rebuilt from scratch (Renzthog, 1998). Well-known problems in these kinds of changes are that it undermines the personnel perspective, that things that work well are thrown out, that it requires a large financial input and that this type of approach is risky (see Rentzhog, 1998; Jarrar & Aspinwall, 1999).

Several researchers have pointed out that there is a great need to change the current culture that exists within the Swedish Police (Arntén-Andersson, 2013; Holgersson, 2005; Ekman, 1999; Wieslander, 2016). A major reorganisation opens up possibilities to contribute to a change in the organisational culture. When it comes to the highest and most central positions in the new organisation, the Swedish Police have however chosen to basically maintain those people who previously held the same or similar positions. The probability is low that someone who had a certain leadership style and approach for 10, 20 or maybe 30 years will, firstly, see that there is a need for change in the way they act, secondly, have a willingness to change, and finally, have the ability to change.

It is possible to find benefits in the reorganisation of the Swedish Police, for example in terms of coordinating purchasing, reallocation of resources and the ability to create uniformity. Observations and interviews, however, indicate that there were wide variations within the same authority before the reorganisation. The organisational change in itself will not automatically lead to uniformity and
after two years there are significant differences in the organisation, for example between command centres in different regions (see Holgersson, 2017). Furthermore, the new authority encountered major problems in terms of purchasing and procurement, but hopefully it's something that will improve in the future. Moreover, reallocation of resources in the new authority has in practice proven to be problematic simply because many districts are in urgent need of extra staff.

It is natural that it may take some time before the effects of a major reorganisation come through and it is natural that there are problems and resistance to change in the change process (see for example Bruzelius & Skärvd, 2012). The police showed declining results in both 2015 and 2016 (see eg Polisen 2016). This is not remarkable because the work to carry out a major reorganisation generates a loss of production. This means that the declining result will be stabilised and turned around after a while. It may then be tempting for police officials and politicians to put out the message that the reorganisation is now beginning to have an effect despite the result not even being at the same level it was some years before the reorganisation and that it was this type of result which was an important reason for the organisation change (Holgersson, 2014). It should be noted, as was stated earlier in this section, that it is natural that the most of the expectations and the expressed picture of the effects of the new Police service will not be achieved because these hypotheses are fundamentally based on an incorrect assumption (see for example Wennström, 2014). The obstacle to obtaining good police work is primarily related to factors other than the design of the organisation (Holgersson, 2005; Amténs-Anderssson, 2013; Wieslander, 2016). The possibility of police activities being improved to any significant extent due to what has been presented above is therefore small.

Police have complained that there is a need for a considerable increase in the budgetary allocations. An increased budget can have a positive impact on the result. In such cases it is important not to draw a hasty conclusion that the improved results must be an effect of the reorganisation. The result must be evaluated on the basis of whether the old organisation received the equivalent additional resources. It must also be mentioned that a focus on information generated by ICT (information Communication Technology) can easily be misleading and inappropriate, while such information easily hides quality and performance issues (Holgersson, 2015b).

To compare clear-up rate on a general level, as is common in the debate on the performance of the Swedish Police, doesn't tell us so much. Firstly there can be differences in the distribution of crime types across periods and areas, where some crime is easier to solve while other crime is harder to solve (see Knutsson, 2013). Secondly routines and laws can change in a way that influences the result (Holgersson, 2005). Thirdly, ICT can easily be used in impression-management strategies. The Swedish Police has to a high extent used window-dressing to create a good impression of how the police organisation works (Holgersson, 2013; 2014). This was also the case within the New York Police when good results were achieved by management using manipulation as a crime numbers game (Eterno & Silverman, 2012) and has also been observed in other countries, such as England (BBC, 2013) and France (RFI, 2014).

Shortly after the reorganisation it was acceptable to say that positive effects will come later. The need for impression-managing strategies using ICT was therefore lower for a while. This posed the risk that the reorganisation’s effect on, for example, the clear-up rate could be interpreted as worse than it was during a period after the reorganisation (Holgersson, 2014). The longer the time passed the more the pressure to be able to show positive results increased and not surprisingly there are several indications that the police then put a lot of effort into using impression-management strategies to get the result to look more positive than it was (see for example DN, 2017). In the long term however it is hard to cover up a bad functioning police organisation using window-dressing (Holgersson, 2014), even if the organisation gets help from other authorities and researchers to build up positive pictures of its capabilities (see Holgersson & Wieslander, 2017). Because of huge expectations of the effect of the reorganisation in combination with the reorganisation not targeting the most important change needs
make the demand of windows-dressing high. However this way of acting is counterproductive in the long term (Holgersson, 2013; Holgersson, 2014; Holgersson, 2015a; 2015b; Holgersson & Wieslander, 2017).

**Police command centres**

In the Swedish Police, there exists no well-grounded analysis that forms the base for the decision to create seven regional command centers (Holgersson, 2017), and this phenomenon of having inadequate foundations for decisions has been observed in relation to several other important decisions connected to how the police organisation would be designed in practice (see Holgersson, 2014). The findings are in line with what other researchers have found to be a common phenomenon during reorganisations made with a BPR approach, where the focus is to make radical changes at the expense of a proper assessment of the existing processes (Jarrar & Aspinwall, 1999). An important starting point during the creation of regional command centres was that the activity would be as uniform as possible. This has not yet been the case and to achieve something like that must be seen as a great challenge as the regions have considerable disparities. Given the great differences and completely different conditions, perhaps, from a citizenship perspective instead that is more important to create good opportunities for flexible and situation-specific solutions before a goal to achieve uniformity? During the 00s centralisation was carried out through the creation of 21 county command centres within the police. It is possible to draw clear parallels between the introduction of these county command centres and the formation of regional command centres. In both cases the decisions have been characterised by a strong determination to push through the changes, even though the foundation for making those decisions was lacking and there was an unwillingness to listen to signals that the solution was detrimental to improvement of the police. (Holgersson, 2005; Holgersson, 2014; Holgersson, 2017).

A common argument against the centralisation of command centres has been that they are “the heart” of a police station. Another argument has been that it is important that operators have knowledge of local factors. Evaluations that can be used to assess these arguments have not previously been performed. The analysis conducted on the basis of the data collected in this study shows that it is possible to create large centres that receive calls, order patrols, and in other aspects manage and control the work, but the parameters of local knowledge and the centre’s physical location are of great importance. The creation of the county command centres had the effect of losing a large part of the local knowledge (see Holgersson, 2001) so for most of the locations in Sweden the creation of regional command centres only led to a deterioration in a limited number of locations. The continued centralisation does, however, to the most part lead to further deterioration and more negative than positive effects for several of the core task of the police, in addition to a higher cost. Below there will be an explanation of what is the basis for these conclusions (for a more detailed description, see Holgersson, 2017).

**An increased distance hampers an effective communication**

Communication is often seen as more effective than it is, where there is an assumption that the message that is sent is identical to the message that is received and that it’s just about encoding and decoding a message (Heide et al 2005). Two main directions in research about communication are the process school and the semantic school (Fiske, 1997) Very simplified, the process school is about how a transmitter encodes information, and how a receiver decodes a message. If there are communication problems it is about locating where the mistakes occurred in the process. In the semantic school, on the other hand, communication is seen as a creation and sharing of meaning, where the message in combination with people creates the meaning of the information (see Fiske, 1997; Heide et al, 2005). The similarity between these schools is that the more codes that it is possible to use in the message, the better the communication appears to be. It is not just about what is expressed in words, but about
other communication such as gestures, irony, etc. The fact that two people have a rich and developed personal common foundation is very important for communication and such things are created by people having joint experiences (Clark, 1996). Furthermore, informal communication, often referred to as “corridor chatter” turned out to be important in building trust and maintaining social relationships that are the basis of cooperation, to coordinate the work and to create an understanding of the local context (Damian & Wozghi, 2003). It is easier for an operator with local knowledge to intercept and understand the meaning of some information and to realise that some of the details are important. Furthermore as the staff in the large command centres normally work with large areas they have contact with many people, which in practice makes it difficult to build the trust that can facilitate collaboration at a distance, both with external actors and personnel. A very important part of communication is feedback. This can be done by words but also through non-verbal expressions (Allwood et al, 1992). Face-to-face communication has proven to be superior in creating trust and good cooperation (Bos et. al., 2002). In these aspects the police centralisation caused negative consequences.

A reduced local knowledge of individuals has major implications

The centralisation of command centres has resulted in the conditions for having knowledge about personnel, callers, external actors and criminals decreasing. This has major consequences affecting, among other things, efficient use of resources, solving crimes, preventing crime, solving problems and providing good victim support. A significant factor as to why centralisation had negative consequences is that there are huge variances in the way that different police officers work (see for example. Holgersson & Knutsson, 2012b; Reiner, 2010), where police officers’ motivation and knowledge are important factors in how they act. These conditions are not static but may vary in both the long and short term. A knowledge of the patrols’ interest and knowledge creates entirely different conditions to be able to lead the work in such a way that the available resources are used and managed in an appropriate manner for the situation (Holgersson, 2017). Some examples: This may involve choosing a particular patrol because they are good at creating confidence and trust, which can be crucial to be able to succeed in going further with some cases. Some patrols have high problem-solving skills, which makes it particularly beneficial to send them to certain types of cases. Some patrols can juggle several things at the same time, while others become stressed. It allows operators to give some patrols cases which they can handle on their way to or from a case, while it will not be good at all if an operator does so when it comes to some other patrols.

There can be reasons other than short-term operational aspects for choosing to send one patrol rather than another to a specific case. It could be important in respect of a particular police officer’s wellbeing. The police officers in the patrol might have had a very heavy case on their previous working shift. Someone who recently lost a loved one may not be the best person to send to a death or to notify a death, etc. Moreover, a police officer may for personal reasons, such as because he or she needs to pick up children from daycare, find it difficult to work overtime and an operator therefore could rather choose another patrol if there is a risk that an action generates overtime, or prepare a change of patrol as soon as it possible so that another patrol can take over the case. This type of consideration is of great importance for the personnel and can be crucial to whether a police officer continues to work on patrol duty. The large command centres have complicated the opportunities to make these types of considerations. Furthermore, the large command centres anonymised the police officers and they often get the feeling that they are only seen as an easily replaceable batch number. It affects the police staff motivation, which as mentioned earlier is critical to their job performance (Holgersson, 2005). In a similar way, the operators at the large command centres are also more anonymous compared to how it was with the smaller command centres, which impacts them in a similar way as the police officers in the patrol car.
Knowledge about callers may be of use when assessing the credibility and seriousness of a situation. An operator's knowledge of criminals can make it possible, on the basis of a modus, signalement or nickname, to get an idea of who may be involved in a crime. It can increase the probability of catching an offender by using the patrols in a specific manner. The centralisations of the police command centres have also had negative impacts on these capabilities.

That personnel in command centres have knowledge about police officers and external actors can open opportunities for other solutions than sending a police patrol to handle a case. In rural areas where there are few patrols and long distances there is a need to make some difficult choices that are not the case when a command centre has a large number of patrols at its disposal. A knowledge of police personnel can also mean that they can be used to answer questions concerning factors in a specific area. This may involve getting help to evaluate information, such as the risk of a problem escalating or a suspect's potential to use violence, or that the police use their contacts, for example to arrange obtaining a key to a boom gate. In this respect too, centralisation has had negative consequences.

An inadequate local knowledge of the geography hampers work

Under stress callers may use the former name of an object or an address, what a place is called in "popular parlance" or use references that are temporary such as "where the roadworks are" or "close to the mobile crane," etc. In some cases, it may be crucial that an operator is able to catch an address quickly, for example if a person is exposed to an ongoing crime which gives a high risk that the call is interrupted or if there is poor mobile phone coverage in an area. The centralisation of command centres has resulted in disadvantages in terms of the operators' ability to interpret an address specification quickly and accurately. Furthermore, the centralisation has the effect that operators have been forced to manage work in larger areas, thus increasing the risk of mistakes as there are more objects and places with the same or similar names. For an operator with local knowledge it is easier to perceive references and to understand what place it is all about.

Another factor where local knowledge is important is about knowing the time to go a particular way compared with another alternative. It is not necessarily so that it is best is to send the nearest patrol in order to get the shortest time to reach a place. By using only maps it can be difficult to determine the driving time. Roads that, for example, according to a map look to be of the same quality could have entirely different road quality and for example during winter time it might not even be possible to use some roads. Similarly, a local knowledge makes it beneficial for an operator to figure out possible and likely escape routes. Initially, it is often an operator who orders patrols to take positions when a fleeing perpetrator is to be caught. The large command centres have had negative consequences for the local knowledge of important geographic details.

An operator with local knowledge can also, for example, know that the site of a traffic accident from a safety point of view makes it appropriate to order more than one patrol to go to the place. Likewise, if there is a serious conflict between neighbours, families or groups linked to the given address, it can be difficult or take too long to find out using ICT (Information Communication Technology). Here also local knowledge is very important for the police officers' safety. It is not uncommon that patrols lack local knowledge. But even if a patrol has local knowledge, there have been interviews which revealed that under stress and with a focus on what is being said on the radio and how to handle a specific case it can be valuable to have support.
A local physical presence is important in many aspects

When command centres have local physical presence the personnel working there are a part of the local community and interviews highlighted how this might influence how much time and how hard they try to solve problems and the energy that is put into cases. Furthermore, there are more opportunities to get interesting information because people know who the operators are and tell them things when they meet operators in, for example, a shop, at football training etc. and the operators also make their own observations outside of working hours.

The physical location of a command centre seems to be important for the level of service the patrols receive, and also plays a part in how the personnel, regardless of level or type of work, show consideration to one another and an eagerness for the work to proceed as smoothly as possible. This involves an operator doing what her or she can to make it easier for a patrol, but it can also mean that, for instance, a patrol can speed up a case if they know that an operator is under pressure because of many cases waiting in a task list queue, or that a patrol might, on its own initiative, announce that they are on their to or from another case and can take a case that the operator mentioned on the radio. Another way that an operator or duty officer can show their consideration for colleagues is by, following completion of a case, contacting them to see how they are feeling, if there are indications that the case might have been emotionally stressful. A local presence and small command centre is, in this perspective, advantageous. A closeness also makes it easier to talk how a place looked or what happened in a case, which is not only positive for developing cooperation, but can also make it easier to process incurred emotions. A closeness between operators and external staff will also make it easier to be part of the same debriefing after emotionally hard situations.

Further, that operators have a local presence has been highlighted as important when it comes to different forms of interaction with the local community. Firstly an operator must know who to contact, where established channels and personal relationships facilitate such cooperation. Both external actors and police officers point out that a good relationship with employees at a command centre makes the willingness to say yes higher when they are asked for help.

A small command centre also meant that operators had fewer patrols to handle compared to the large command centres. Interviews have shown that operators at smaller control centres thought in advance about how the patrols should be allocated and were used to having as much discretion as possible to handle other incoming tasks. It was therefore possible to reduce the lead time for decision-making and resource utilisation could be more effective than simply looking at a map and appointing a patrol. In the larger command centres, operators have a focus on assigning patrols that are not working on a case to an upcoming task. This means that more transportation resources are used up, because they do not to the same extent reflect on whether a patrol in one area will soon complete a task, but instead send a currently vacant patrol from another area.

Locally based command centres also meant that there were good conditions for workers at a command centre to both know particular details and also to have good opportunities to put these specific details into the right context. As the personnel working on street duty and the employees at the command centre knew each other, they felt that it was easy to make contact and express tips, feelings and thoughts. A locally based command centre with a closeness between different categories of staff was also beneficial as valuable dialogues arose which opened opportunities to “put one and one together”. All this helped bring about the right conditions to clear up and prevent crimes. The centralisation of control centres has, from this perspective, brought about a large disadvantage.
Other effects of the centralisation of police command centres

Certain cases can be defined as dynamic and complex where many patrols are involved. In these cases, there are indications that the creation of regional command centres was advantageous in respect of the police’s ability to handle these types of cases. However for larger and more serious situations where there is a great need for a close cooperation with other actors, centralisation did not show these types of positive results. That’s because many other actors, such as emergency services, the county councils and county administrative boards are not organised in the same way as the police. Instead, collaboration initiatives such as Trygghetens hus in Östersund which is organised at the county level showed positive results in terms of the ability to interact with external actors.

Staff turnover is considerably higher in the large command centres, compared to the smaller command centres. One reason is that development opportunities are perceived as small at large command centres. Another is that the large command centres are designed to be a kind of call centre solution, where you do not feel the same participation as was the case when the centres were located locally. Both the greater variety of work and the close contact with street duty personnel also appears to have been a positive aspect of the locally based command centres. High employee turnover and the fact that regional command centres are located in places where there is tough competition for labour have proven to be problematic.

Proposal to create virtual command centres

Virtual technology now makes it possible to create a feeling of sitting in a particular place which, in reality, is somewhere else. By making use of virtual technology, it is possible for the police authority to have central management of the command centres while it is possible to create favourable conditions to build local knowledge. That is to say that there is a regional command centre at a physical location in each region, but all personnel that are included in this centre are not located at the same site. A solution using virtual regional command centres makes it possible to maintain the current fundamental organisational concept and create clusters that are advantageous for the business both in the short and long term. With such a solution there is a good potential to be able to handle larger/dynamic issues while at the same time there are good opportunities to have a high local knowledge and local presence. This can help to increase the ability of the police to solve and prevent crimes, save lives and reduce injury outcomes, and enable the police to handle other types of basic tasks in a better way. A solution making use of virtual regional command centres also improves the possibilities to recruit and retain staff at the regional command centres (Holgersson, 2017).

During the study it appears that several police officers no longer have the willingness and energy to complain about the negative effects of large command centres. For new officers is it difficult to make such comparisons. People’s great ability to adapt will have the effect that the criticism of the police’s solution of large command centres will fade over time. That criticism is not more extensive than it is also has to do with the widespread fear of coming out with criticism within the police (see for example Wieslander, 2016). These circumstances mean there is a risk of insufficient pressure to change the work at the command centres and use the virtual technology that can improve the performance of the police.

Conclusion and discussion

In the short term, efforts to implement the reorganisation resulted in a loss of production. In addition, the way that the reorganisation was implemented has been bad for the chances of getting a well-functioning policing because the focus has mostly been on organisational charts and not on the content
of the business. Furthermore, in the long term there is not much to indicate that the reorganisation itself will result in the police being improved to any significant extent, because success factors to achieve a better police had a very small connection to the fact that the police is now organised in a national police force.

The police put a lot of effort into strengthening their brand by communicating externally. The Swedish Police have successfully managed to get a message across that has drawn attention to problems encountered and the fact that the police need more money, and have succeeded in shifting the focus away from how the police use the more than 20 billion Swedish Kronor allocated to them each year. The example of the police's way of organising their command centres can be used to clarify the phenomenon how the police use their resources in an impropriate way. Decision basis and impact assessments of the centralisation of command centres were substandard even non-existent. The centralisation of command centres that has been a procedure for two decades has not only made the business more expensive, it has also resulted in the police being mostly less able to carry out their core tasks. For some people, such development is not surprising, since research has shown that the police are very far from being a learning organisation (see eg Arntén-Andersson, 2013). For others, it may seem strange that a police service that clearly requests that it needs more money is not striving to organise activities in such a way that it effectively economises with the public resources assigned to it. Instead it appears that there is a risk that the police choose to continue with a solution of, for example, organising the command centres that - among other things - not only reduces the chance of solving and preventing crimes, but is also contrary to a fundamental objective of the aim of the major reorganisation of the police - to get closer to the citizens. It is possible to find research explaining why those politicians and management that have responsibility clearly do not see the great need to listen to suggestions to improve the police, in respect of identifying problems connected to, for example, the way of organising the command centres and noticing that decision-makers often focus on positive indicators when they evaluate the outcome of an ongoing process of change (Sleesman et al, 2012).

In summary, an increasing police budget meant that contributed extra funds can be spent on covering up problems that are caused by the reorganisation. According to the findings, when doing an overview analysis of the reorganisation - as well as an analysis of a concrete example of command centres – it is legitimate to question whether it is reasonable that the police get more funding when they manage existing funds in the manner they do now.

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