Media Crisis Decision Making

A case study of SR (Swedish Radio), SVT (Swedish Television) and TV4

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The puzzle
On the 11 September 2001, 3:03 pm Swedish local time, two Boeing 767 airplanes had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City. The first plane was perceived by most members of the three main Swedish broadcasting organizations – the Swedish Public Radio (SR), the Swedish Public Television (SVT) and the commercial station TV4 – as a small private plane with a navigational error.¹ With the crash of a second plane into the second of the two World Trade Center Towers seventeen minutes later it became evident that the world was witnessing a large scale terror attack – broadcast live on CNN as it happened. The drama further intensified with the crash of a third plane 3:37 pm into the Pentagon, and with incoming information half an hour later that a fourth plan on route to Washington and presumably to the White House, had crashed in Pennsylvania. At 3:59 pm the southern tower collapsed and 4:28 pm the same happened to the northern tower. As an act of terror, directed towards the worlds financial, military and political super power – the US – it was a giant news event by all news evaluation standards² and as such posed enormous demands on the news organizations to broadcast on the event.

The three broadcasting organizations chose somewhat different strategies to deal with the event. At SR, the event was reported live in the news program Ekot at the 3 pm news broadcast, and one hour later the managerial group at SR decided to broadcast an eight hour long live program on the event. TV4 broadcasted its first news casts at 3:53 pm and by 4:20 pm commercials were taken away in order to give room for a live broadcast, partly based on CNN material. SVT broadcasted its first extra newscast at 3:25 pm – and after the 4 pm Rapport – the 24-hour news desk at SVT 24 broadcasted a two hour analogue program whereas the evening report was made by the ordinary news programs (Aktuellt and Rapport). SVT’s coverage was extensive but the station did not, as compared to TV4 and SR, clear one channel but rather alternated between its two channels. Besides breaking news, programs such as sport, cultural, and regional news were broadcasted.

A couple of days after, the Swedish broadcasting organizations’ management of the event was commented on by a Professor of journalism studies, Stig Hadenius, on the most influential debate page in Sweden, DN-debatt. In the article, Hadenius gave SR and TV4 good reviews for their decisions to tear the preplanned schedule apart and to only broadcast on the terror attacks, whereas SVT got criticized for not making enough scheduling changes. SVT was further criticized for letting the digital channel SVT 24, as the least experienced of the three news programs at SVT, take care of the reporting during the first two critical hours after the attack. The

¹ The first plane hit the first building at 2:46 pm Swedish local time.
² The prospect for a news item to get published or broadcasted increases if it deals with “politics, economy, crime or accidents, if there is a short geographical or cultural distance, to event or situations, that are sensational or surprising, is about single elite persons, and are described simple enough, but are important and relevant, takes place during a short period of time but as part of a theme, have negative elements, and have elite persons as sources” (Hvitfelt, 1985:216).
article ends by Hadenius asking; “what made the public service company [SVT] unable to make the same decision as the commercial TV4?” (DN-Debatt, 14 September 2001).³

The starting point for this dissertation has been Hadenius rather simple and straightforward question: why do news organizations make different forms of decisions during crisis events? It turned out that the issue was hard to answer based on previous research related to news production and crisis/disaster reporting. As a result, the dissertation at hand will investigate Hadenius question for the 9/11 case and in doing so will present new theoretical approaches in the study of news organizations actions during crisis events.

Aim and research questions

Crises pose enormous demands on news organizations to provide citizens with fast, comprehensive and reliable information. Accordingly, news organizations face giant challenges in living up to today’s expectations regarding crisis coverage. Despite the vital role of news organizations in covering crisis event, research dealing with news organizations ability to cope with these kinds of events from an organizational viewpoint has to date been limited.

This dissertation does not include the actual reporting of the event, and to ignore news might, for a media study, be quite a rare take. I would thus argue that in an era dominated by recurrent “disaster marathons” (Liebes, 1998; Liebes and Blondheim, 2005; Katz and Liebes, 2007), the decisions that shape news organizations’ coverage are important research topics in themselves. It is not enough to conclude that news organizations occasionally use different formats, which in themselves have significant implications for journalistic working conditions, but also to distinguish the dynamics behind the decisions made (or the absence of decision making). This dissertation should be read against the backdrop of the lack of previous empirical research in the area as well as inadequate theoretical approaches which can help explain news organizational processes related to managerial scheduling decision making, newsroom reorganization and journalistic role conceptions.

The first aim of this dissertation is to provide empirical knowledge on how news organizations handle crisis news events from an organizational perspective. This will be done through a detailed process tracing study of the main decisions taken by SR, SVT and TV4 in the wake of the terror attacks September 11, 2001 (see Appendix B). The second aim of the dissertation is to propose additional theoretical approaches to the study of news organizations in crisis. The rationale for this will be demonstrated by a literature review, singling out existing gaps in previous research. Additional theoretical approaches to the study of news organizations in crisis will then be discussed in relation to the literature review as well as in connection to the four articles included in this dissertation. The articles pose the following research questions: 1) How to define crisis news events from a news organizational perspective?; 2) How to explain for differences in managerial news organization decision making in relation to crisis news events?; 3) How to explain for differences in newsroom’s responses to crisis events?; and 4) Which roles do rituals play in managerial decision making? Finally, in contrast to the reliance on routines in previous research on news production, the concluding section will advocate the role of news

³The following e-mail was sent to everyone at SVT from the CEO and the Director of news and current affairs. “SVT has been criticized for its coverage of the terrorist attacks against US. A part of this criticism is justified: for example we forced the audience to jump between the channels in order to receive information, we took a twenty minute break in the reporting between 6:40 and 7 pm, and until the 6 pm Aktuellt our first broadcasts suffered from a shortage of pictures. On the other hand, the criticism that we were initially slow is groundless. Our first newscast was broadcasted at 3:25 pm and TV4’s first newscast was broadcasted at 3:54 pm. Our second newscast was broadcasted at 4 pm, whereas TV4 made its first follow-up newscast at 4:20 pm” (translated e-mail dated 14 November 2001).
organizations, journalists as actors, sense making and previous experiences in understanding news media decision making during crisis events.

Rationale of the chapter
As observed by Scanlon (2007), there were few publications dealing with media in relation to crises and disasters within the traditional field of media and journalism studies prior to 9/11 (p. 85). This changed somewhat after September 11, but the main focus of such studies has been on issues concerning the abandonment of journalistic norms like objectivity and factuality (Liebes and Blondheim, 2005; Katz and Liebes, 2007; Zandberg and Neiger, 2005; Schudson, 2002; Reynolds and Barnett, 2003; Borden, 2005). Altogether, this has resulted in limited knowledge on aspects of news production in relation to non-routine events.

The knowledge gaps in previous research will further be discussed in the literature reviews of the two fields that have been found to have the most relevance for the research question; here named previous research on news organizations and production and media research on disasters and crises. There is additional value in discussing the two research together traditions together since, as stated by Scanlon (2007), they seem in general unaware of each others’ existence and accordingly cross referencing between the two of them have been nearly non-existent. In the literature review, these two traditions will be juxtaposed, in order to see where they overlap (or not) and how they together can provide knowledge on news organizations’ handling of crisis events.

This dissertation, and the articles it compromises, should be read as examples of “heuristic” case studies with the purpose to “identify new variables, hypothesis, casual mechanisms and causal paths” (George and Bennet, 2004:75). The dissertation aims to develop theoretical and empirical insights in a specific field of media studies – news organizations actions during crisis events. It should be noted that this is a study based on the actions of two TV-stations and one radio station, all Swedish, during a very limited period of time, e.g. the first critical hours after the September 11 attacks (although the time period chosen is crucial for someone interested in news organizations management of crisis events). This has of course clear limitations in terms of generalizations to other media types as well as other national and organizational settings. It should also be clear that this dissertation does not intend to make any prediction about the way the organizations will behave in future crises situations. On the contrary, the study understands news organizations as dynamic systems evolving over time as a function of, among other things; experiences, technological innovations, personnel changes etc.

Finally, the extent to which the results and arguments of this dissertation are applicable to everyday news production remains an open question for further discussion and research.4 One way of looking upon crisis events in relation to routine coverage is proposed by Sood et al. (1987) in arguing that disasters reporting, due to the increased stress levels and rapid change of organizational structures provide excellent case studies also for scholars interested in everyday news organizational processes. This so since ”the process of mass communication can be investigated more easily when tracing how the news media cover such ‘rapid-onset’ disasters as earthquakes, hurricanes, and nuclear accidents, which are demarcated by rather clear-cut boundaries and occur at definite points in time” (Sood et al., 1987:29). I will thus leave the

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4 Despite the fact that the study is about news workers in three Swedish news organizations, research on Swedish journalists or news organizations has not been the focus of the theoretical chapter (even though a smaller section is devoted to the history of the organizations in Appendix A). The reason for this is partly pragmatic, in terms of limited space and time, but is foremost an effect of the theoretical focus in the dissertation.
potential differences or similarities between crises and everyday news organizational actions to further research.

Outline of chapter
This chapter centers on three parts. Firstly, a review is conducted on the main trends observed in the previous research done on news organizations and news production. Secondly, a similar review is compiled on the research covering the role of the media in crises and disasters. Thirdly, the gaps in the literature review are identified and discussed in connection to the main findings of the articles.5

Literature review
The literature review aims to present research on news organizations, news production as well as crisis and disaster reporting. The selection and discussion of the literature have been done in relation to the topic for this study. In the final paragraphs, implications for research on news organizations in crises will be discussed in relation to the articles in this dissertation.

Previous research on news organizations and news production
This section will provide a brief overview of previous research on news organizations and news production. It should be said that the sociological literature on news production, which had its peak period in the 1970s and 1980s, is vast and the purpose here is not to recapitulate the whole tradition but rather to focus on the main trends related to the questions posed in this dissertation. According to Zelizer (2004), the above described research tradition can be summed up in the following: “journalists were seen within this view as sociological beings who systematically acted in patterned ways that had bearing on the stature and shape of the journalistic collective at large” (p. 47). According to the quote it is evident that journalists’ decision making and variations between news organizations have not been the focus within this research tradition. Nevertheless, the perspective has made important contributions to the study of journalism, and the pros and cons will be discussed below and in the final summary. However, the section will start with a presentation of the perspective based on the following main headlines: news organizations; norms, culture and values; journalists as actors; and finally coping with the unexpected.

News organizations
How to understand news organizations
According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996) journalism research on the organizational level has posed questions such as: what are the organizational roles?; how is the organization structured?; what is the policy and how is it implemented?; and how are these policies enforced? (pp. 142-143). According to the authors, the organizational level focuses on different parts of the organization, in terms of how they cooperate or run into conflict with each other, and emphasizes the necessity to take the organizational structure into consideration when capturing the nature of the organizational life.

5 To some extent, the discussion also includes findings presented in Appendix B.
News organizations tend in general to be structured along the following three levels or lines: the front line which includes the ones making the actual news products (reporters, photographers etc.); the middle level (editors, producers and others who coordinate the work); and the top executive level who makes organizational policy and other overarching decisions. These basic levels can then be combined and structured in different ways depending on organizational settings. A typical assumption in research on news organizations has been that organizational roles affect news workers attitudes and norms. Another established outlook within this perspective has been the notion that news organizations operate in an environment in which they compete on a market for news (ibid, p. 151).

Other researchers, such as Ettema et al. (1987), have a slightly different take on what to include in research made at the organizational level, to which they adhere the following lines of research: the bureaucratic nature of news production; the routines and conventions by which work is accomplished; and the management of organizational conflict (p. 765). As Shoemaker and Reese, the above mentioned authors emphasize organizational conflicts as one important strand, but in contrast to the latter, they include practices of news production. The authors further underline that the main part of research on news organizations has been made at the routine level. The different views on where to place journalistic routines on the ‘research map’ can be explained by the dominance of the perspective in the field, where there has been little efforts made in establishing how routines relates to other aspects affecting news organizational practices. For example, Lau (2004) argues that there has been a lack in previous research in distinguishing factors that belong to external and internal pressure on journalists. It should also be noted that even though scholars in the field have stressed the importance of organizational context, “the routines and constraints imposed by the media organizations are often neglected” (Esser, 1998:376-377).

The discussion above stresses the importance of linking the different levels of impact (individual, routines, organizational, outside factors and ideology) on journalism to one another in order to understand how they, at a combined level, can explain news content (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Similar calls for research that integrates different levels in the study of journalism has also been made by other scholars (see Dimmick and Coit, 1982; Pan and McLeod, 1991; Hertog and McLeod, 1995; Hirsch, 1977). More specific suggestions on how to link different levels of analysis have been proposed by scholars such as: Ehrlich (1996) who advocates rituals as the linking theoretical concepts, or Cook (1998), Sparrow (1999) and Ryfe (2006a) who argue for the use of new institutional approaches, or Benson (1999; 2004; 2005) who recommends Bordieu’s field theory as an integrating theory. These calls have thus been fairly ignored within the research community. This is so since, according to Cottle (2003) the focus on bureaucratic routines as the sole explanation for new organization behavior has so far prevented news production studies from combining theoretical approaches that are commonly used in media studies in general; like political economy, organizational studies and cultural studies (p. 18).

**Power and authority**

According to Schudson (1989) the most well researched feature in the field of news organizations is the interaction between sources and reporters, where far less attention has been given to the internal dimensions in terms of reporter-editor relationship (the dimension was mostly dealt with in earlier journalism studies). In this section some of the findings from research on hierarchical power relations within news organizations will be briefly discussed.

Researchers dealing with the topic have mainly discussed the issue in terms of conflicts. The way conflicts within news organizations have been portrayed varies between different
scholars, from researchers depicting news organizations as relatively uniform to those who argue that conflicts are built into the system on horizontal as well as vertical levels. The most well researched topic in the literature on news production has been the relations between reporters and editors from a functionalistic perspective, where individual behavior is understood as based on hierarchical positions within the organization. The rationale for conflicts has most often been depicted based on the fact that reporters are closer to their sources whereas editors are more attached to audience and organizational policy perspectives (Tunstall, 1971; Gans, 1979/2004; Blumer, 1969; Burns, 1969; Breed, 1955). Other researchers have proposed that the size of the organization in question has an impact on journalists’ autonomy. Johnstone (1976) and Weaver and Wilhoit (1986) claim that journalists in large news organizations have less autonomy, yet Demers (1993), and Peiser (2000) assert that editors and journalists have more autonomy in such organizations.

Another field of conflict explored in the literature has been between different news organizational departments, where responsible editors for each department fight for resources (Sigal, 1973:21). Ericson et al. (1987) argue that newsrooms are characterized by constant conflicts and divisions. What is interesting with their study is the emphasis on how journalists use organizational values and norms in order to promote their own interests and create an autonomous space. “Organizational constraints are not only limiting what the journalists can do, but enabling in justification and excuse for the choices s/he makes” (p. 349). The authors point to the inaccuracy in depicting newsrooms as based on normative consensus, “to the contrary, we have shown that values and practices are not fixed rigidly, but are worked out in ongoing negotiations and conflicts among newsroom personnel at all levels” (ibid, p. 350).

Another important question concerning hierarchical power relations is the potential conflict between business and journalistic values. The business perspective has in many ways, especially in the newspaper world, been a constant companion to journalism since its very start. On the other hand journalistic values have likewise been understood as a strong opposing force, creating constant clashes between the two perspectives (Gans, 1979/2004, chapter 7; Bantz, 1985; Boyer, 1988; Auletta, 1992). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) underline that traditional studies in journalism tend to depict the news departments of the organizations as operating separately from the business departments. The authors emphasize that “indeed, news departments are usually structured to ensure journalistic autonomy. However, no law dictates this division; in fact the wall between the editorial and business side of media organizations has been steadily eroding” (p. 156). As an example of the latter, Underwood (1993) concludes from a study on the relations between editors and managers at U.S newspapers, that editors are more and more getting into the same mindset as managers.

Despite descriptions of direct control and explicit power struggles, the most common way of understanding power within news organizations has been through the lack of open conflicts. The line of reasoning has been that organizations without direct means of control and with a high degree of decentralization and autonomy tend to have elaborated norm systems as control mechanisms. In this case, they have to rely upon unwritten policies, being taught to newcomers through socialization and working routines. In general, socialization has been understood as taking place in two ways, into a common journalistic culture as well as into newsroom cultures and norms (Breed, 1955; Tunstall, 1971; Gans, 1979/2004; Soloski, 1989; Sigelman, 1973; Schlesinger, 1978). Researchers in news sociology then tend to understand power as disguised by the news organizational ideology of autonomy (Donsbach, 2004; Schlesinger, 1978; Harrison,
Schlesinger (1978) gives an example of this disguise of control in his book *Putting reality together*, when describing how the journalists being interviewed for the study were astonished by how the description of control over journalists work was portrayed in the book. They had never perceived themselves as controlled and were not aware of editor’s influence on their work. In Schlesinger’s words, "they espouse, as it were, the BBC’s micro-myth of independence" (p. 135).

In line with the same argument, the editors in their turn were unaware of indirect means of control and thought of themselves as independent towards the management.

Most newsmen would go along with this, and agree with the long-serving duty editor who said, ‘Power is operational at the desk level – you can’t get away from that’. In the sense that virtually all decisions concerning the handling of the news stories are taken there, this view is perfectly correct. But in the sense that the value framework for the taking of those decisions have already largely been developed at higher levels of control, to which most newsmen have no access, the orthodox account misses an important point. It concentrates on references upwards when the full picture requires us to acknowledge the greater importance of references downwards (Schlesinger, 1978:149).

Schudson (1989) thus underlines that there is a general lack of research on editor’s control and relations to reporters (p. 272).

**Norms, culture and values**

*Professionalism and institutions*

One way of understanding the interlinking between journalism practices, news organizations and the relation to their environment is through the concept of institutions. According to Ekström (2002), institutions can be divided into two main categories (p. 268). The first of these, social practices, involves aspects like policy, social routines, procedures and relations. The second, cosmology, relates to values, norms, perception and culture. These two aspects together create common attitudes and ways of behavior, which defines journalism as an institution, and thereby helps to reduce uncertainty by providing knowledge on patterns of behavior and interaction.

According to Bennett et al. (1985), news organizational imperatives are closely connected to the imperatives of governments and other social institutions, and together they contribute to the creation of the news logic (p. 52). Journalism can be understood as a “paradigm-based field”, defined as “broadly shared assumptions about how to gather and interpret information relevant to a particular sphere of activity”, where one of the characteristics is the high degree of professional training (ibid, pp. 54-55). The notion of journalism as an institution and profession is closely related and its physical manifestations can be seen in journalistic routines of production. “The combination of professional training and routinized practice corresponds to a high degree of consensus on story selection, reporting angles, and trends in the profession” (ibid, p. 55).

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6 In the Swedish context, research has shown that the traditional Swedish culture of editorial offices at newspapers can be described as “atomistic”, which means that the individual journalist has quite a high degree of freedom to carry out his/her work, but less possibilities to influence the news papers at a more overall level (Löfgren Nilsson 1999:185). From a management perspective, the former Head of *Ekot*, Eric Fichtelius, points to the fact that news organizations, despite the idea of freedom and autonomy for individual workers, are still depending on a distinct leadership. “It is surprising – almost terrifying – how our anti-authoritarian journalistic working environments demands authority from their bosses” (Fichtelius, 1995:32). According to Fichtelius, one of the main assignments for news organizational managers is decision making. In the same vein, Per Andersson writes about the demands for a strong leader at *Ekot*, which according to him might be a result of the exposure that individual journalists have to live with. The role of the leader is then to set the standards of what is bad and good and in that way release the pressure on the individual co-worker (Andersson, 1995: 51-52).

7 According to Schlesinger, the macro-myth being BBC as independent and freestanding.
Professionalism governs what behavior is acceptable and not, and serves as the guiding star for journalists in knowing what to do in a given situation (Larson, 1977; Friedson, 1986). According to Tuchman (1975), control is the foundation of news production, which is constantly threatened by “the amount of work to be done and the number of individuals who must participate in the task” [in the particular case of TV-production] (p. 150). In order to maintain control, work is relying heavily on routines and standardized forms for production. Tuchman (1972) argues for example that objectivity can be understood as rituals, defined as “routine procedure which has relatively little or only tangential relevance to the end sought” and which serve to defend the organization from being criticized (p. 661).

The notion of professionalism can be understood as an enforcement system where journalists act in accordance with the prevailing ideology, and thereby on an everyday basis reinforce it. "Everyday news work serves as professional ritual to reaffirm journalist’s support of their professional beliefs and keep the tenets of this ideology in place” (Berkowitz, 2000:129). The system is contained and kept in place by new organizational members being socialized into the culture and mythology of what it means to be a journalist by more experienced colleagues (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Thus, there is a growing awareness among journalism scholars that changes in the media landscape (such as the introduction of new technologies) are challenging the notion of journalistic professionalism. One example of such a trend is multi-level platforms where media technologies are mixed together and provide new ways of production which accordingly demand new journalistic skills. According to Künig-Shankleman (2000) it is inevitable that news organizations will have to learn how to strategically deal with the challenges posed by the “digital revolution”.

Developments such as the internet and the World Wide Web, digitalization, rapid advances in computing power and bandwidth availability and the development of open global networked electronic platforms are gradually eroding the structural barriers between the media, telecommunications and information technology industries. This phenomenon, known as convergence, is leading to profound change (Künig-Shankleman, 2000:2).

The fact that journalism as a profession is challenged by technological and social changes has also been advocated by other researchers; for example through the existence of “bloggers” (Singer, 2007) or new digital news technologies and 24-hours environments (Cottle and Ashton, 1999; García Avilés and León, 2002; Ursell, 2003; Aldridge and Evetts, 2003; Erdal, 2007) or by more women entering the field (de Bruin, 2000).

The notion of journalism as a profession is closely connected to journalistic routines, norms and cultures, which will be the topic for the next section.

Journalistic routines, norms and culture

For a start, it should be noted that the wave of ethnographic news production studies done in the 1970s and 1980s has had a very strong influence in the field (Cottle, 2000 in referring to studies such as: Epstein, 1973; Altheide and Rasmussen, 1976; Murphy, 1976; Schlesinger, 1978; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979/2004; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Bantz et al., 1980; Fishman, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Ericson et al., 1987; Soloski, 1989; Sigal, 1973). According to Cottle (2003), even though previous studies on news production have acknowledged the role of journalistic culture, news values and professionalism, it was bureaucratic routines that became the main explanatory for the newsroom study tradition (p. 14). The reliance on routines created a tendency towards an “organizational functionalism”, which resulted in descriptions of procedures, routines and constraints as being universal across news organizations and newsrooms and accordingly “ideas
on journalist’s agency and practices become lost from the view in the workings of bureaucratic needs and professional norms” (ibid, p. 17).

In general, research focused on routines takes as a starting point the news media as a type of organization motivated by processing and selling news, where routines help organizations reach its goals. According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996) routines help media organizations deal with the following stages in the production process: “what is acceptable to the consumer (audience)?; what is the organization (media) capable of processing?; and what raw product is available from suppliers (sources)?” (p. 109). The concept of routine has been the main common dominator in sociology-inspired research on news production, with the focus on certain specific characteristics like competition, sources or time. Routines have been understood as being homogenous across news organizations, not only involving technical practices, but also the norms and values underpinning news work. In this way, routines have been closely connected to the notion of news organizational culture. This might be the reason for why culture tends to be regarded as universal across news organizations, rather than being understood as specific organizational cultures, for example expressed by Harrison (2000):

A journalistic culture is produced by and produces a set of consistent formulas, practices, normative judgments and explicit values. A journalistic mythology is passed down to successive generations of journalists. It is transmitted and sustained via: training; shared experiences; shared distance from an understanding of the audience; shared reliance on technology and electronic information sources; shared understanding and acceptance of logistical constraints such as cost, time and space; the need for planning; shared misunderstandings of the origins of control, via the myth of the editorial autonomy; and a shared journalistic language. The significance of the existence of a particular culture, which in this case is journalistic, is that the production of a homogeneous set of skills and practices ensures a professional standard and quality (Harrison, 2000:137).

Another way of describing universal characteristics of news organizations is by its relation to sources (Sigal, 1973). For example, Mark Fishman (1980) depicts journalism as being run by a “beat-system”, which determines aspects like personnel allocation or source selection. The beat-system allows journalists to get rapid information from a pre-fixed selection of sources. When referring to how journalists creates news, Tuchman (1978) uses the term “news net” to describe how journalists seek news from locations and institutions that tend to generate newsworthy events.

An additional prominent feature of journalistic everyday life has been its obsession with time (Schudson, 1986; Schlesinger, 1977; Tuchman, 1978; Breed, 1955). According to Schlesinger (1977), journalists work inside a stop-watch-culture centered on cycles shaped by dead-lines. “In general, journalists are among those occupational groups in industrialized societies for whom precision in timing, and consequently and exacting time-consciousness is necessary. Railway men are another” (Schelsinger, 1978:84). As noted by Schudson (1986) the obsession with time is generated within the newsroom itself, more as an internal norm than anything else. “No one in the audience gives a damn if ABC beats CBS by two seconds or not. The journalist’s interest in immediacy hangs on an anarchistic ritual of the media tribe” (p. 81).8

According to Ehrlich (1995) it is not time nor beats that are the determine factor in news work, but rather the “competitive ethos” of journalists. According to the author, competition is not only driven by business interests but also by strong social and cultural forces within the

8 It should thus be noted that crises place another set of demands of news organizations to report on the news as fast as possible, where time not only becomes an issue for internal journalistic competition but might have real societal effects if being delayed (Nohrstedt, 2000).
newsroom. TV-journalists in particular live in a reality where keeping tracks of rating figures and rivals is a natural part of everyday life, which even becomes more important than producing original and unique news items. Rituals such as “good journalists want to win” are part of the competitive ethos that drives work and creates the norm on which journalistic work is set (p. 198). Journalists become socialized into a common norm system which makes competition the natural way of relating to news work (Gans, 1979/2004:176-181). Drawing on Zelizer’s (1993a) concept of “interpretative communities” Ehrlich (1995) explains how the culture of competition is sustained across news organizations. “The competitive ethos becomes part of the glue that helps hold together the interpretative community of television news workers, even as they move from one organization to another” (p. 207).

Competition as a driving force in journalistic work is also mentioned by other researchers and for example Gitlin (1993:24) connects the idea of time and competition in arguing that TV-journalists obsession with speed is connected to their fear of being driven out of competition. Bantz et al. (1980) argue that TV-stations, due to technological advances and demands for profit, have become so routinized that they more or less resemble a factory, including the inflexibility that characterizes these types of organizations. One example taken from the study made by Bantz et al. is a local executive producer who complains about the lack of flexibility in the organizations by saying; “this place doesn’t respond to anything but a real disaster” (p. 61). Further, the norms and routines based on competition have effects on the news content in so far as it contributes to the homogenization of news (Gans, 1979/2004:180; Bourdieu, 1998; McManus, 1994).

According to Ryfe (2006a) the strong tendency to view routines as universal has resulted in descriptions of journalistic organizations as “remarkably uniform”.

Over this period, scholarly conclusions about the news had been remarkably uniform. Study after study had shown that across organization, geography, size and kind of news outlet, the news is extraordinary homogenous. Why such homogeneity in the news? Largely, this literature concluded, because journalism is defined by a shared set of organizational routines and practices. […] The idea is so irresistible that it is easy to forget that it is a theory, not a fact. Much of the subsequent work in the field has simply assumed it and gone on to examine homogeneity’s various ‘effects’, principally on policy making and public opinion (Ryfe, 2006a:135).

In accordance to the quote above, Ryfe (2006b) urges researchers in the field to move beyond the assumption of reporters as rules-followers and to start asking questions concerning what a journalistic rule is and how it is applied in different settings (p. 203). In order to do so, he proposes new institutional theory as a way of overcoming the “old” static view on routines, since it opens up for an understanding of rules as social. In line with this, Cottle (2000; 2003) has called for a “second wave” of empirical studies on news production, and Dickison (2007) for a shift of focus from “a sociology of journalism” to a “sociology of journalists” which study them “as members of a distinctive occupational category engaged in a distinctive, and changing form of labor” (p. 195). Dickinson (2007) further emphasizes that we still know very little when it comes to how journalists learn the routine behavior needed to accomplish their work and how they adjust their knowledge on routines to different news organizations and settings (p. 201). Another recent, and interesting contribution to the study of news production is field theory, inspired by Bourdieu's thinking (Benson, 1999; 2004; 2005; Schultz, 2007). Field theory makes an important contribution by situating the media in its dynamic environment with social, professional, cultural and institution forces, but it primarily focus on the institutional, rather than the organizational, level.
Differences between news organizations

As was highlighted in the section above, a limited number of studies have questioned the homogeneity across news organizations. In this section, a few examples of exceptions will be highlighted. One notable exception is Esser (1998) who compared German and British newspapers in terms of different organizational settings. He found clear distinctions between the two national newsrooms in terms of centralization and decentralization, which had important implications for the way work was carried out. Yet another study by Esser (1999) reveals that the degree of “tabloidization” in three countries (US, Britain and Germany) can be explained by differences in journalistic values, media cultures and economic/legal conditions. Another example of a national comparison, in relation to journalist’s role perceptions, is Donsbach and Klett (1993) and Donsbach and Patterson (2004), who demonstrate that journalists role conceptions are depending on national contexts. The fact that newsrooms have different role conceptions depending on national belonging as well as over time is further emphasized by Hellman (2006), who bases her conclusions on a comparative study on the British BBC and the French TFI between 1986 and 1996. Further, from an organizational culture perspective on news organizations, Küng-Schenkleman (2000) shows the impact of culture on strategic decision making processes within BBC and CCN. Harrison (2000) provides another comparative example from a national perspective. Based on a study on the private British company ITN and the public BBC, the author concludes that senior bosses at ITN were more visible and directly involved in the production, whereas BBC displayed a more democratic organization with horizontal lines of communication (even though Harrison argues that the latter is, in fact, a disguise for hierarchical practices) (p. 129).

Given the discussion above, comparative research on the organizational level seems to be one fruitful way of questioning and testing the notion of news organization practices as homogenous. However, in-depth studies on specific news organizations can provide insights on how they relate to journalistic norms and values that tend to be understood as universal norms. For example Schlesinger (1978) found in his study on the BBC that the BBC editors were cautious in broadcast news without careful checks, despite the immediate competitiveness of being fast, since they valued BBC creditability higher. According to one of the BBC-journalists interviewed for the study, “it is agony to a newsman to miss a bulletin, but reliability and accuracy are more important than speed… It is not enough to interest the public. You have to be trusted” (p. 89). Schlesinger’s study opens up for the possibility that news organizations might pay different attention to certain values, which in general has been conceived of as uniform across organizations. In line with this, Lester (1980) demonstrates that the concept of newsworthiness, which in general is seen as homogenous across news organizations, should rather be understood as also defined within specific organizational settings. In relation to the heavy reliance in journalism research on routines in news production, Nina Eliasoph (1988) argues in a study done at a political oppositional newsroom, that economy and organizational factors determine news content more than the reliance on routines.

Journalists as actors

The role of individual journalists

Part of the mythology surrounding journalism is the notion of the individual journalists as a lone hero fighting the system. Given that, one might expect journalism research to follow this line of thought and give individuals a strong position. And in the early days of journalism research there was in fact a tendency to do so. The most notable example is David Manning White (1950) who
introduced the ‘gate keeping’ concept to the study of news making, arguing that news selection is based on the subjective choices made by a “Mr. Gates”. The concept of individual influence was thus seriously questioned when Geiber in 1964 replicated the study with a larger sample including 16 wire editors, which were all found to make the same types of gate-keeping decisions. The conclusion drawn from the study, as well as from follow up studies, was that news selection was better explained by organizational pressure then subjective judgment (Hirsch, 1977; Whitney and Becker, 1982).

According to Zelizer (2004), research on news organizations shifted focus in 1960s when “[…] an emphasis on organizational constraints began to displace a focus on the values, norms and ethics, roles and norms of individuals. At the same time, the inevitability of social constructions and their organizational function were accepted as part of most research conceptualizations” (p. 63). As a result, research concerned with individuals in the setting of news organizations has been sparse. Another field of study related to journalists as individuals has been research concerned with journalists personal political beliefs, race belonging and economic status (Weaver, 1998; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Lichter and Rothman, 1981). The results were thus never situated in an organizational context and they have been criticized for failing to prove that individual characteristics influence news content (Clancey and Robinson, 1985; Gans, 1985). One illustrative example is Gerbner (1969) who conducted a study based on institutional pressures on journalist’s decision making in four countries. Gerbner argues that pressure on individual journalists come from two basic sources; internal within the media organization and external to the organization.

What we are really concerned with in such analysis is the institutional distribution and exercise of power. To be sure, individuals may possess power due to personality, talent, competence, conviction and other traits, but we may assume that these are similarly (even if not evenly) distributed in any larger population. At any rate, we are concerned with the systematic exercise of powers that reside in institutional roles and relationships to centers of power (Gerbner, 1969:242).

In Gerbner’s work, the institutional, sources relations, socialization and hierarchical power within the organization determines decision making and out-rules individual influence.

The general emphasis on structural constraints in news organizational research has resulted in that “we know very little, and certainly far less than we might, about what goes on in the minds of reporters and editors who process the news” (Stocking and Gross, 1989:3). According to Schudson (1989) the limited interest in individual journalists influence on news production is due to the general understanding in literature on journalism that news organizational constrains rule out individual intentions (p. 274). As stated by Shoemaker and Reese (1996): “These professional roles and ethics have a direct effect on mass media content, whereas the effect of personal attitudes, values, and beliefs on mass media content is indirect, operating only to the extent that the individual holds power within their media organization sufficient to override professional values and/or organizational routines” (p. 65). The lack of research on individuals in news organizations might be that research has had a hard time proving that personal views override the professional role and actually influence news production, but it is equally likely that the focus on routines and organizational constrains has been so overwhelming that it has not been considered worthwhile to raise the question in the first place.

The lack of research on journalists as agents in news organizations has further, not surprisingly, resulted in a lack of studies on how individuals influence decision making in news organizations (Berkowitz, 1997). “This level [the journalists’ social setting] of analysis greatly
downplays individual judgment, portraying it as constrained and shaped by the policies and imperatives of the news organization. The focus is not on journalists’ decisions but rather the social forces that shape and constrain those decisions” (p. 105). The same gap in existing literature is pointed out by Donsbach (2004) in stating that research on news organizations have little to say when it comes to journalistic decision making since they rarely specify factors that might explain decision making and when they do “they describe social settings rather than processes and, therefore, lack explanatory power” (p. 135).

According to Cottle (2000), the reliance on routines and bureaucratic aspects as the explanatory factor for newsroom behavior, has limited individual journalists to products of a system rather than as thinking conscious producers of news workers in a professional context (p. 22). Accordingly, cognitive and social psychological aspects have been neglected in journalism research, as pointed out by Donsbach (2004): “[…] contrary to their application in reception and effect analysis, when it comes to explaining journalists’ news decisions, cognitive-psychological and socio-psychological approaches has so far received little attention by the scientific community” (p. 132).9 As a response to earlier research, Cottle (2000; 2003) argues that it is time for journalism research to move beyond institutional and structural explanations, and to bring in journalists as agents into the analysis.

The earlier theoretical and explanatory emphasis placed upon routine tended towards a form of organizational functionalism in which ideas of journalist agency and practices became lost from the view in the workings of bureaucratic needs and professional norms. This may have helped to qualify easy ideas of conspiracy and ideological partisanship as the principal explanation of news output, but at the cost of denying human actors their central role in the purposeful construction and reproduction of differentiated news products [… ] (Cottle, 2003:17).

Accordingly, Cottle advocates a conceptual shift from “routine” to “practice” in research on news organizations.

During the 1990s researchers have become more interested in journalists’ and producers’ own accounts on how they accomplish their work (Dickinson, 2007:193). According to Boyd-Barrett (1995) these ethnographic studies have moved away from the tendency to study journalism through the application of traditional sociological concepts (p. 275). For example, Morrison and Tumber (1998) have studied the experiences of so called embedded journalists in the Falklands war based on their own account, and Tumber and Palmer (2004) on the war in Iraq. These studies take on an explicit aim in portraying the “journalists as persons” (Morrison and Tumber, 1988: introduction). Despite their vivid and gripping accounts of journalists covering a war, the studies do not place journalists’ actions in an organizational context or in a theoretical framework. The same can be argued for Tunstall (1993) who gives a fairly detailed account of producer’s terms, without placing the accounts in a sociological framework (in comparison to his earlier work). Another recent contribution to the practices of journalism worth mentioning is ethnographic studies on journalism, for example on foreign correspondents (Hannerz, 2004; Boyer and Hannerz, 2006), or on how journalists covered the Chicago heat wave in 1995 (Klinenberg, 2002), or on the development of BBC (Born, 2004). According to Dickinson (2007), the 1990s journalism research was witnessing a trend towards more focus on the working conditions of individuals but without placing these practices in an overall setting.

9 One study focusing on emotions and cognition in news reporting during September 11 is Coleman and Wu (2006), who studied the use of non-verbal communication for journalists covering the events. The study shows that nonverbal communications peaked in the second stage of the crisis when journalists tried to make sense of the event. Another example of psychological analysis is a study done by Himmelstein and Faithorn (2002) on how journalists cope with stress when reporting in dangerous situations.
While an important part of these analysis recovers a sense of news worker agency, media researchers seem reluctant to balance their accounts of the constraining effects of contextual, organizational, economic, source, or formal regulatory factors with sociological analysis of journalist’s daily judgments about what is required in their jobs, what the production of acceptable journalism entails, or how they learn to accomplish it. One gets little sense from this research of the negotiated, collective behavior of human actors in social settings (Dickinson, 2007:194).

In relation to what Dickinson is emphasizing, taken both individual as well as organizational and social settings into account when studying journalistic practices, the aim of the various perspectives applied in this dissertation is to bring in journalist as an agent in to the study of news work practices but to also take into account the organizational and social contexts in which work is performed.

Sense making as a routine
The notion of news as a social construction is an essential element in journalism research (Schudson, 1989). For example there is a vast amount of literature on framing in connection with news reporting (see for example Entman, 1993; Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Nevertheless, the following section will be confined to the aspects of importance for news production, in which categorization is a central concept. The central idea underpinning the notion of categorization is that events which can not be placed on a cultural and social map, fail to be comprehensive to eventual viewers or readers. Meaning is created by linking the present to the past through the placing of events on already existing cognitive maps. It all started in 1974 when Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester published an essay proposing a typology of news, based on whether a news event is planned or not and whether the planners of the event are the ones promoting it or not. The typology consisted of four categories; routine, scandal, accident or serendipity news. Categorization is a way of explaining how news organizations are able to control their workload and thereby cope with the uncertainty and unpredictability inherent in the business of news (Molotch and Lester, 1974; Bantz, 1990). By that, categorization becomes yet another aspect of journalistic routines.

According to Tuchman (1973) journalists do not only categorize news but also “typifies” it, which according to the author “refers to classification in which the relevant characteristics are central to the solution of practical tasks or problems at hand and are constituted in and grounded in everyday activity” (pp. 116-117). News work depends on the ability to typify news into certain categories and to apply the appropriate type of production modes. In Tuchman’s words news organizations cope by “routinizing the unexpected.” Tuchman shifted the focus in sociological research from studying news organizations from an organizational functional perspective to a symbolic interactionistic perspective in order to understand the social construction and meaning making of news. Even though the notion of typification is based on individual perceptions, it became generalized to include all journalists in all kinds of organizational settings. Based on interviews and participants observation, Tuchman concludes that journalists basically work with the following type of news: “hard/soft news”; “spot/developing news”; and “continuing news”.

For example, spot news are characterized by their sudden outbreak, described as “specifically unforeseen event-as-news”, and as such they demands to be processed quickly (ibid, p. 120). One example of such a news event is fires – journalists know they do happen on a regular basis, but never where and when they will start. News work is then organized as to constantly check with sources where these kinds of events may occur. Another type is “developing news” defined as “emergent situations”. The example mentioned here is an air plane crash, which “although this event is unexpected, there are, nonetheless, limitations upon the ‘facts’ it can possible contain”
(ibid, p. 121). Even though the actual main story remains the same, additional information is added to the story, and these ongoing changes constitute developing news (ibid). In contrast to the above mentioned types of news, “continuing news” are generally pre-scheduled, and as such help news organizations to regulate work (ibid, p. 123).

Based on a similar idea, Philip Schlesinger (1977), divides news into “planned news” events and “spot news”, where the latter are “unexpected and unplanned” (which includes events such as; earthquakes, air crashes, disasters and fires). Spot news distinguish themselves by a different time perspective and by demanding rapid decision making, as well as the abandonment of plans, mobilizing of resources and a frenetic work place. These are the moments when journalists feel they become “real” journalists.

Schlesinger does point to the fact that the situation is in reality “far from chaotic at anything other than a superficial level, its rationale is to aim at control and prediction […]” (ibid). As emphasized by both Tuchman and Schlesinger, routine responses are applicable even to unexpected news events; or rather – even unexpected news events are expected.

In terms of text production, categorization has been discussed in relation to how journalists report news based on their knowledge of previous similar events. For example, studies have shown that journalists decide whether an event has news value or not based on their memories of similar earlier events and how the news event in question was reported (Stocking and LaMarca, 1990). Kepplinger and Habermeier (1995) did a study on the news coverage of AIDS, earthquakes and truck accidents, and they came to the conclusion that after the occurrence of a particular event, the coverage of similar events tended to increase. Donsbasch (2004) explains the phenomena based on that journalists learn to attach attention to particular types of events. “Because similar events have been covered before, something that fits the pattern will be covered with higher priority at a later stage” (p. 142). In general, it seems like journalists develop “causal maps”, which results in that they repeatedly perceive events in a similar manner (Bantz, 1990; Stocking and Gross, 1989).

Research on how journalists use history in their reporting has been advocated in several studies, for example how journalists report on significant political events (Lang and Lang, 1983; Lang and Lang, 1989), and recently in connection to the ‘war on terror’ (Ryan, 2004; Winfield et al., 2002). According to Zelizer and Allan (2002) journalists managed to cope with reporting 9/11 by “borrowing from routines implicitly set in place for covering a wide range of earlier breaking news stories, journalists pieced together their coverage” (p. 4). On the contrary Bouvier (2005) emphasizes that 9/11 was a new type of event, which caused journalists enormous problems during the first hours in terms of understanding what had happened. “The broadcasters were unable to prepare for the development of the story. This resulted in having to improvise a great deal; they had to ‘learn’ 9/11 on screen” (p. 25). The reporting of September 11 should then rather be understood as a live-search for meaning, than grounded in an historical understanding.

According to Edy and Daradanova (2006), historical references can have a clear effect on the way journalists search for information when reporting an event. The study done by the authors examines how the reliance on historical analogies steered journalist reporting on the crash of the space shuttle Colombia into certain possible explanations for the crash and leave others,
which did not fit into the previous analogy, uninvestigated. Robinson (2006) reminds us, in comparing how journalists tried to draw upon the Vietnam War when reporting on the Iraq war in the 2004 US presidential campaign, that history may also be contested and conflicting. This is a reminder of how journalists tend to treat history in a somewhat arbitrary way, which might for example, have important democratic implications (Bennett and Edelman, 1985).

Even though studies related to how journalists report on news based on history and memories of previous events have produced interesting results, they have not been linked to organizational decision making, and are therefore of limited interest to the specific research questions posed in this dissertation.

**Coping with the unexpected**

**Routinizing the unexpected**

However, even though news organizations have the ability to cope with events that for the most of us as news consumers would be unexpected, there are still some events that surprise even hardened journalists. It begs the question of whether an event that is truly surprising really can be categorized into a certain type of news. Tuchman (1973) argues that despite the fact that most events can be placed in pre-fabricated categories, some events are so unique that they even become problematic for journalists to categorize. Tuchman refers to these events as a “what-a-story”, based on journalist’s reactions.

Symbolically, the degree to which this typification is itself routine is captured by the almost stereotypical manner in which verbal and non-verbal gestures accompany the pronunciation of ‘what a story!’ ‘What’ is emphasized. The speaker provides additional emphasis by speaking more slowly than usual. The speaker adds yet more emphasis by nodding his head slowly, while smiling and rubbing his hands together (Tuchman, 1973:126).

It should thus be noted the event Tuchman refers has nothing to do with disasters and crisis, but deals with the announcement of President Lyndon B Johnson not to run for re-election in 1968.

Other researchers also mention events with a truly surprising character, which distinguish themselves from the normal news flow. For example, Romano (1986) refers to these kinds of events as a “holy-shit-story”, described as an event when the journalist in question,”recounted an event too unusual, too unbelievable, to be true” (p. 45). In the words of Gans (1979/2004), these events are called “gee whiz story” and are described as the following:

This is a residual category that includes all stories which evoke surprise. Although role reversals and heroes are sometimes labeled gee-whiz stories, these stories are, typically, reports of unusual fads, cults, and distinct vocations or avocations. One producer defined the genre as ‘an extraordinary, unusual, but not terribly important item; a story we had one night of a hen laying green eggs’ (Gans, 1979/2004:156-157).

To the authors, the stories included in this category seem to be characterized by some sort of paradox or clash which makes them sensational. In accordance to Berkowitz (1992) the understanding of non-routine events provided by the limited research done on the subject can be summed up as the following: “Firstly, news workers are surprised and acknowledge it. Second, news workers decide to give non-routine news better play than most routine stories receive.

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10 Romano writes about the concept in relation to the following headline; “Guest Drowns at Party for 100 Lifeguards” (p. 44)
Third, news workers becoming willing – and see a need – to stretch resources in terms of news space (or time), personnel, and equipment to give the story special treatment” (p. 84).

The fact that the above mentioned researchers all had to create a category for unexpected events, speaks of recognition of that there are moments when the journalistic everyday assumptions about the world becomes challenged. These moments of framing disruption have thus not been the focus of research, but rather the deviant cases to established theory in the field. It should thus be noted that the type of stories that the above mentioned researchers refer to are all centered on the element of surprise, but do not concern themselves with crisis events. In Tuchman’s categorization of news, disasters and crises are places in the “spot news” category.

Further, at the same time as Tuchman (1977) acknowledges the “what-a-story” as being “internally contradictory” she compared it to an “emergency-routine” and concluded that “yet, when a what-a-story occurs, everyone knows what is to be done” (p. 47). The only real change imposed by these stories is a change in format.

Modes of reporting are associated with scheduling. Designated important because it defined predictions, a what-a-story receives larger headlines and more intensive coverage than other news events of comparable historic urgency. Size of headline and extensiveness of coverage may be said to represent the mode in which a what-a-story is routinely handled. Their headlines scream. But screams are meld into everyday routines, just as the urgent appeal of a news caster interrupting an entertainment program to announce a plane crash sounds less urgent every time it is experienced (Tuchman, 1977:47-48).

In my dissertation, I agree with Tuchman in emphasizing the change of format required by new organizations in times of unexpected, but I do not agree with her saying that these changes are solely based on universal routines across news organizations at large.

A more promising news typology based on media routines and media preparations has been developed by the Swedish media researchers Lars Nord and Jesper Strömbäck (2003; 2006). The first type of news events in their typology, where the news organizations tend to lack both preparedness and routines to cover is “new and surprising events”, which the authors include the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster, the murder of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme and the September 11 attacks. Further, a second type for which media routines are bad but preparedness good are “new but expected events”, for example the Gulf War in 1991 and the war [on terror] in Afghanistan; the third type involves events characterized by “surprising events which have happened before” for which the media has bad preparedness but good routines. Examples of these kinds of events are typical disasters such as airplane crashes, floods and earthquakes. The last category for which both routines and preparedness is good is characterized by journalistic professionalism, where the example mentioned is the US invasion in Somalia or the Iraq War (Nord and Strömbäck, 2006:89-90).

To sum up, this section has pointed to the lack of clear definition and concepts in discussing the non-routine and the unexpected. This is troublesome since we can not know the extent to which news organizations are capable of managing these kinds of events if it is unclear which events are being referred to. Despite this, the research tradition provides important insights in terms of taking journalists’ own perceptions into account and connecting them with organizational working procedures, which will be the focus in the next section.

Organizational practices in reporting a “what-a-story”

Following up on the findings made by Tuchman (1973; 1977; 1978), Dan Berkowitz (1992) did a study on an American television station’s response to an airline crash – defined as being a “what-
In accordance with Tuchman, Berkowitz came to the conclusion that news workers, even when dealing with the unexpected, rely upon routines. My central point is this: even when dealing with highly unusual, highly unexpected stories, news workers try to find routine ways of dealing with the non-routine. Key to their success is the ability to typify the scope of news situations, as well as to predict the resources required to report specific news items. Non-routine news work, then, does not rely on procedures entirely different from routine coverage. Instead, it depends on adapting strategies from everyday work routines. Negotiation and improvisation are present in non-routine news work, but these aspects are used mainly to guide the application of various routine practices (Berkowitz, 1992:82-83).

To Berkowitz, news work in non-routine conditions is guided by improvisations and negotiations, which help to adapt existing routines to the actual situation. In order to cope with the event, journalists mobilize all resources available. Despite changes in resources need to cover the event, another important difference from everyday life is the change in work rhythm since “the story simply could not be covered within the organizational time structure for producing the news” (ibid, p. 83). By following a modified version of everyday routines news workers find procedures to handle the news.

Of particular interest for this study is that Berkowitz comes to the conclusion that typification is essential in this process and that previous experiences had an effect on how the event was perceived. “The need to rely on story typification to meet organizational demands led news workers to see a plane crash rather than a hotel fire, and the way that news workers subsequently covered the story was in line with their plane crash typification” (ibid, p. 93). This reminds us of what Tuchman (1973) says about the role of history in relation to a what-a-story, “that is, rules governing the coverage of a ‘what-a-story’ were invoked by citing another ‘what-a-story’” (p. 128). Knowledge of the product that can possibly be created by applying a certain routine, taking the technical and logistical difficulties into consideration, is vital in creating a standard by which the product can be bench-marked (Berkowitz, 1992). As a result of the learning process Berkowitz (2000) concludes that the handling of the non-routine is a quite predictable matter and that “much of what-a-story coverage is therefore typified as quite expected news” (p. 131).

A slightly different take on the role of history in relation to journalist practices is advocated by Zelizer (1993a). She proposes to understand journalists in terms of “interpretative communities” as defined as people “united through shared discourse and collective interpretations of key public events” (p. 219), rather than viewing journalists and journalism practices as a ‘profession.’ A more dynamic approach to journalistic practices is opened up when journalists are perceived as a community held together by the telling of common stories. The emphasis here is rather on how shared experiences influence journalistic norms and attitudes, a process in which big news events play a pivotal role.  

The shared past through which journalists discursively set up and negotiate preferred standards of action hinges on the recycling of stories about certain key events. Journalists become involved in an ongoing process by which they create a repertoire of past events that is used as standards for judging contemporary action. By relying on shared interpretations, they build authority for practices not emphasized by traditional views of journalism (Zelizer, 1993a:223-224).

Berkowitz is here referring to an event when an Air Force fighter crashed into a hotel lobby near the airport.

Based on a study made on journalism in Israel, Meyers (2007) argues that journalistic routines do not only come from tales told in connection to big news events but also from the way journalists understand and tell the history of journalism on a general level.
According to Zelizer (1992) these key events, or “critical incidents” can be defined as “the moments by means of which people air, challenge, and negotiate their own standards of action. […] For journalists, critical incidents suggest a way of attending to moments that are important to the continuing well-being of the journalistic community” (p. 4). Critical incidents then represent a more common journalistic dilemma or practice in the history of journalism, and as such give rise to discussions about journalistic attitudes, and accordingly set the standards for future reporting of similar events. Zelizer then touches upon something important that has been somewhat neglected in research on news work, that is; where do practices come from, how are they developed and which events are of significance for the continuous learning of how to conduct journalism? To understand journalism in terms of a community in which journalist practices are debated and decided upon is also advocated by Dickinson (2007:202).

The role of previous experiences for news organizations ability to report on crisis events is also advocated by Nord and Strömbäck (2006) who argue that the possibility for news organizations to do a good job increase if the organizations have confronted a similar problem before, both in terms of the actual reporting but also in connection to preparedness. “If an event can be anticipated, news departments can change their priorities, time schedules and working procedures in order to improve coverage of the forthcoming event” (pp. 88-89). Nord and Strömbäck (2003) thus stress the lack of empirical research on how news organizations manage truly unexpected events, which they argue can only be done in connection to really big news events, since “normal” crises rarely expose news organizations to severe constraints (p. 167). In line with this, one of the aims of the dissertation is to contribute with such empirical knowledge.

Concluding remarks
This concluding section aims to briefly highlight some aspects of particular relevance for the dissertation at hand. For a start, it should be noted that the main focus for research in the field of journalism has not been on practices related to crisis reporting, but rather on exploring the general mechanisms behind everyday journalist activities. However, in the following, the field will be discussed in relation to my dissertation.

Firstly, it should be acknowledged that the perspective centering on journalists’ routines has provided a great deal of useful knowledge in explaining, what has been perceived as, universal features of news organizations behavior. The problem is rather that the perspective has been successful to the extent that it has been accepted as truth rather than a hypothesis. As a result, comparative studies testing the assumption of homogeneity across news organizations have been scarce. Consequently, there is limited knowledge on the extent to which news organizations differ in their routines, norms and cultures.

Further, the prominent position of routines in explaining news production has resulted in the fact that the role of individual journalists in news work has been overlooked in this research area. Likewise, there is a lack of research dealing with short-term decision making and cognitive perspectives. One reason for the emphasis on routines, and the absence of individuals, might well be that most research in this genre has focused on the newsroom level in contrast to the managerial level (which one could expect to be less suitable to explain by routines). To include the role of managers in the news production process during crisis events is accordingly one of the ambitions of this dissertation.

Further, the somewhat static way in which the routine concept has been applied has hampered questions concerning development and change of routines. According to Ryle (2006b)
research in the area needs to address issues related to the origins of journalistic rules and how they are applied in different settings. There are thus exceptions to the dominant trend. For example Zelizer’s (1993a; 1993b) notion of interpretative communities opens up a more dynamic way of understanding journalism practices, since she depicts the development of journalistic practices as a learning process, in which big news events play a pivotal role. The focus in Zelizer’s study has thus been on practices in connection to reporting news and not on organizational related practices, which is the focus for this study.

One final point to be raised is that the literature review demonstrates the lack of clear definitions in how to conceptualize non-routines news events. Even though researchers such as Tuchman (1973), Romano (1986) and Gans (1979/2004) do acknowledge that there are some events which clearly stand apart from the everyday orderly world of journalism, the non-routine category has somewhat been a slop pail for events that do not fit into the routine concepts. A commonality in the thoughts presented by these scholars is that their categories have a higher degree of surprise than everyday events. But in order to develop a more solid understanding of how routines are applied - or not applied - in these types of situations, clear definitions are essential. It should be mentioned that attempts have been made to create typologies based on different types of ‘extraordinary events’ and the accessibility of routines for handling them (see Nord and Strömbäck, 2003; 2006). This provides a promising start in that direction. Bearing this in mind, it is now time to turn to the other field of research addressed in this dissertation – media research on disasters and crises.

Media research on disasters and crises

It should be noted that this perspective is more diverse and, as a result, less coherent than the one previously presented. One important aspect contributing to the diversity in this field is the fact that it consists of scholars from various perspectives and disciplines. In the following presentation, I will focus mainly on two groups of scholars; journalism researchers interested in crises and disaster sociologists with an interest in media. It should also be noted that the vast amount of research on crisis news coverage and reporting has been somewhat excluded from the literature review in this dissertation, since it falls outside the scope of this study. The aspects of interest to this dissertation will be recapitulated in the following headlines: lack of definitions and theory; reporting crises and disasters; and organizing news work during disasters.

Lack of definitions and theory

Research on media in connection to crisis and disasters has mainly dealt with the following aspects: how citizens frame the event; how the news media provides citizens with relevant information; how citizens use the information provided by the media; and how the news media collect information during extraordinary events (Tierney et al., 2001:141). In both an international as well as in a Swedish context, research has foremost dealt with media coverage of crisis events in the form of case studies focused on catastrophes, humanitarian crises and extraordinary events (Jarlbro, 2004:18). The heavy reliance on case studies has opened up for a variety of theoretical perspectives and as a result, more systematic studies and theory building attempts have been lacking, as stated by Nohrstedt (2000) based on a literature review on catastrophe - , risk - , emergencies and crisis communication research:

It should be pointed out, however, that the field is quite heterogeneous, and there is no common denominator in terms of theory or methodology. This is a consequence of the fact that most studies are case studies that have been initiated by the events in question; ambitions to generalize have been secondary at best. Another
contributing factor is that researchers from different academic disciplines have applied a variety of theoretical frames of reference (Nohrstedt, 2000:137).

Further, since case studies in the field have mainly focused on textual dimensions, they provide limited knowledge on the production aspects behind the reporting. As Cottle (2003) points out: “when the analyst infers, as is often the case from a textual interpretation alone, the possible explanations, motivations and reasons that have informed their production, angles are often to be found dancing on the pinhead of textual analyses” (p. 5). This is also the reason why such studies will not be discussed here.

Another aspect of significance, in the same manner as with the discussion on news sociology research, is the lack of definitions in the field, where concepts such as crises, disasters and catastrophes, are used in a somewhat overlapping manner. More systematic efforts in conceptualizing have, for example, been made by Nohrstedt and Nordlund (1993) who differentiate between risk, catastrophe and crisis from a process based perspective; arguing that the process starts with increasing risk, which passes on to a catastrophe and finally, with increasing magnitude and scope, results in a crisis (p. 9). Related to media reporting, the process perspective can be understood in terms of three different phases; the warning, the acute and the after-math phases. Crisis communication can further be described as a triangle between the media, citizens and public authorities, where legitimate crisis communication presuppose all parts being involved in the communication flow (Nordlund, 2000). More recently, Quarantelli (2005) has argued for the importance of differentiating between catastrophes and disasters when studying media reporting, where catastrophes are characterized by events in which society as a whole is nearly unable to cope with situations, where hurricane Katrina provides an example.

In catastrophes compared to disasters the mass media differ in certain important aspects. There is much more and longer coverage by national mass media. This is partly because local coverage is reduced if not totally down or out. There is a shift from the command point of view that prevails in disasters to an Ernie Pyle approach (“six feet around the foxhole”) in catastrophes, especially by the electronic media. There is even more of a gulf between the content of the electronic media and the print media (with the latter focusing on looting and other dramatic visuals). There is far less of the normal filtering and screening of stories especially in the electronic media (Quarantelli, 2005:5)

As already mentioned, the general lack of definitions is one reason for the absence of systematic studies and theory development in the field (Scanlon, 2007; Nohrstedt, 2000; Jarlbro, 2004). Besides difficulties within the field when it comes to systematic research there is virtually no intersection between researchers dealing with the media in disaster and crisis and scholars in the field of mass communication and journalism. According to Scanlon (2007), the two research fields “appear unaware of what each other is doing. Cross referencing is rare” (p. 75).

As was argued in relation to research on media sociology, the lack of clear definitions poses problems in knowing the extent to which referred to events are distinguished from each other and from everyday reporting. Further, in contrast to news sociologist scholars interested in categorization/typification from a journalist’s perspective, researchers in this tradition tend to take an outside-the-media perspective in defining events, which makes it even harder to answer the question above. It should thus be said that the distinction between the routine and the non-routine has not been of major importance to the field of research. As argued by Scanlon and Allred (1982), (without presenting any empirical research); “The mass media behave roughly the same way when responding to all major events whether these are natural or man-made disasters, criminal occasions such as assassination attempts, hijacking, hostage takings or other acts of
terrorism or simply, major unexpected events” (p. 363). After presenting a list of 21 points describing media behavior during extreme events they conclude by raising the question if it might be the case that there are no differences between media’s reporting on these kinds of events in comparison to their everyday reporting. “If the media do as suggested operate with a great deal of predictability this crisis model may be equally applicable in normal times. It may be a model of general media behavior in the coverage of unexpected events rather than a specific crisis-oriented model” (ibid, p. 373). It should be noted that the researchers cite previous work on news sociology when discussing the homogeneity of media, which assumes that they have adopted a similar perspective when it comes to homogeneity across news organizations.

**Reporting crises and disasters**

According to Nohrstedt (2000), media tends to confront four types of conflicts in their reporting on crises and disasters, based on an ideal model of the media as providers of objective and accurate information. The first of the conflicts concerns whether or not the media should take up on their role as the ‘fourth estate’, and accordingly scrutinize the state and involved actors, or if the role as provider of society relevant information should be prioritized. According to disaster research, news media usually adopt a “command post” view, which means that they tend to lean on statements from emergency personnel in their reporting. The problems with the command post view are; firstly, that emergency personnel seldom have a clear picture of the event, and secondly, the reliance on one type of source often make reporters miss out on other angles and activities undertaken by other actors (Scanlon, 2007:83). Since reporters turn to their established sources, “the activities of volunteers, emergent groups and organizations that are not part of the normal ‘beat’ system or regularly courted for news tend to be ignored in mass media” (Quarantelli, 1996:7). The only deviation from the everyday beat system observed is that the use of citizens as sources increases (Quarantelli, 1996:8-9). According to Quarantelli (2002) the reliance on official sources increases even more during acts of terror (p. 17).

The second conflict listed by Nohrstedt (2000) takes place between the aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of an event and to entertain. The last refers back to the ‘the media logic’ with its preferences for personification and dramatization, which tend to undermine the information value (Nohrstedt, 2000). According to Scanlon (2007) the media tend to slant towards the latter in their reporting on disaster, in terms of the personalization of stories and the highlighting of local angles (pp. 81-82). The second conflict is somewhat related to the third, which evolves around news value and following up news, where the media is often criticized for jumping from one big news event to another; at the expanse of follow-up and analysis.

The last conflict deals with the acute crisis phase, and the conflicting demands between speed and accuracy. This is the most referred to problem in studies dealing with media in crisis and disaster. The reason why the conflict has attracted a lot of attention is probably due to the delicate dilemma it poses to journalistic ideals. Research on the topic seems to agree on the tendency for broadcasting media (and today also internet based news) to broadcast all that comes in due to an insatiable demand for information (Wenger and Quarantelli, 1989; Quarantelli, 1989; Waxman, 1973; Nord and Strömbäck, 2005). Part of the open-gate phenomenon in the acute phase can be ascribed to the initial lack of information on the event, which causes media to broadcast all that comes in and to use a considerable amount of live coverage (Quarantelli, 1996:8). “Contrary to what one might expect, the funnel analogy to normal news gate keeping does not apply in disasters. Initially there is a shortage of news about a disaster”. This makes the media to open up its channels and broadcast all that they have which results in a situation of “open gates” where the news flow resembles an inverted tunnel (Sood et al., 1987:32).
The open gate phenomenon occurs since disasters generate a demand for information at the same time as the media suffers from a lack of information, which results in the abandonment of everyday gate-keeping functions (Scanlon et al., 1978). Due to the competitive nature of the media, studies on disaster coverage show that media monitor their competitors and copy what they think is newsworthy, which risks contributing to the spread of incorrect information (Scanlon, 2007:76). Disaster studies further demonstrate that various types of media have a propensity to get involved in different ways. For example, Quarantelli (2002) argues that in times when there is not a widespread loss of electrical power, television plays the main role, and when there is, radio takes on the prime role (p. 13). There are further differences in the way various media types report on the event, where for example radio tends focus more on interactions with citizens.

As Nohrstedt (2000) points out, the conflict between accuracy and speed is genuine since the two demands can not be satisfied at the very same time. Basically, journalists can deal with the situation in two ways: the first strategy would be to go for speed and report all incoming information, where evaluations in terms of accuracy are left to the audience; the other strategy would be to focus on accuracy with the risk that information might come too late to have any value for the audience (ibid, pp. 149-150). The conflict goes to the core of the journalistic role conception. For example a study done on CNN, ABC, NBC and CBS during the first five hours after the September 11 attacks shows that the speed to report the news, the pressure to fill enormous amounts of airtime and the difficulties in getting information forced the journalists to report rumors, use anonymous sources and include personal reflections in their reporting. As a result they also changed their role conceptions to include positions such as expert and social commentator, even though they most of the time still took the role of traditional journalists (Reynolds and Barnett, 2003: 699).

Organizing news work during disasters
In this section, findings related to how news organizations restructure in order to cope with crisis and disaster news will be accounted for. For a start, in contrast to many other types of organizations, news organizations tend to lack disaster planning and in the few occasions where they do not, the planning is likely to be of poor quality (Quarantelli, 1996:5; 2002:5). This might be a bit surprising given that research at the very same time shows how disaster news often require news organizational re-structuring to be able to provide extensive coverage of the event (Quarantelli, 1996:6).

The need for organizational modifications is well documented within this field of research (even though these studies tend to be empirical and lack more elaborated theoretical frameworks). Organizational changes observed include changes in structures, mandates and organizational processes. Quarantelli (2002) argues that this is one way in which local media reporting during disasters distinguishes from everyday reporting. “So unlike the handling of most news stories, news about disasters forces organizational change. Thus, there is an atypical situation for the reporting of news. It should also be noted that usually there is not much conscious awareness of this among MC [mass communication] personnel” (p. 12). One empirical example of news organizational changes brought on by a crisis event from a Swedish context is a study by Andersson Odén et al. (2005) on the coverage of the Tsunami that struck south East Asia, Boxing Day 2004. The study shows how Swedish newsrooms were re-organized in order to

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13 Quarantelli’s study is based on findings from local media’s coverage of disasters, but also corresponds to my own findings at the Swedish news organizations that formed part of this dissertation.
meet the demands for increased coverage, for example by combining divisions and installing new groups. Based on this, the authors of the study argue that news organizations in acute situations possess considerable flexibility and capacity to reorganize. Swedish news organizations were for example able to quickly send personnel to South Asia in order to cover the disaster (p. 175). The tendency for news organizations to rapidly re-allocate personnel and focus all resources on the event in order to facilitate information collection has also been observed by disaster researchers (Scanlon and Allred, 1982).

An effect of news organizational re-organization during disasters is the change of power relations within the organizations. For example Sood et al. (1987) argue that disasters tend to make some parts of the organization more important than others, where for example routine tasks lose priority. Further research in the area proves that the altering of power relations depends on the size of the news organization in question, where small stations tend to be less affected since they even in their everyday work perform a variety of tasks, a tendency that become more salient during disasters. On the other hand, news work at large news organizations is usually divided into specialized tasks which will be kept in place during a disaster, only to break down if the disaster is big enough. In accordance to the argument above, the most dramatic changes to the everyday organization then take place within middle sized news organizations (Quarantelli, 1996:7).

The re-structuring of division of labor also affects organizational decentralization (Quarantelli, 2002; 1996; 1989; Sood et al., 1987). According to Sood et al. (1987) decentralization is taking place since a crisis situation demands flexibility and speed. The need for independent actions from journalists increases due to the uncertainty of the situation. Further, in really big disasters it is often hard for the journalists to communicate with the home desk, which results in a higher degree of autonomy (Quarantelli, 2002:12). Finally, news media do compete with one another in times of disasters and crisis but there are also moments of sharing when crises are extremely severe (terror attacks) or when it is more cost effective to co-operate (Sood et al., 1987:36). One such change of priorities in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks, mentioned by Zelizer and Allan (2002:4) was the temporary freezing of competition between different American networks.

Concluding remarks

Even though the studies mentioned above have produced many valuable insights on how the media copes with crisis events, they lack elaborated theoretical frameworks that can help explain why news organizations manage, or fail, to adapt to crisis situations. The lack of theoretical contributions explaining news organizational management might be due to the fact that the field has mainly focused on individual journalists and the operational level, and not on the managerial level.

In contrast to journalism research on news work, the main focus in research on the media in disaster and crises has been on extraordinary societal events. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that these events are extraordinary for the journalists covering the event. This is so since research topics have been selected based on their significance for affected actors and not in accordance to the journalist’s perception of the event in terms of routine or non-routine coverage. This raises the question on whether research in this tradition is studying a particular form of disaster/crisis reporting or simply everyday journalism. It might well be the case that some of these events are truly non-routine for the media, but it might also be the case that they are routinely covered. Even though the relation between the routine and the non-routine has not been the research focus within this tradition, some (contradictory) remarks can be found. For example, Scanlon and Allred (1982) assert that media reporting on disasters might just as well be
the same as everyday reporting. Similarly, one of the key findings from this perspective is that disaster news coverage requires organizational restructuring, which on the other hand suggests that these events are atypical from a news organizational perspective.

For someone interested in news production practices and how a crisis event affects news organizations, the lack of definitions from a journalist’s perspective is a significant drawback. It should be noted that the lack of insights based on journalists’ perceptions has been addressed. For example Norhstedt and Nordlund (1993) have called for research that focuses on journalists’ experiences in reporting in crisis situations (p. 61). Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out, that by applying an outside-the-media perspective this field of research adds an important component in understanding crisis events, even from a journalist’s perspective. Here, the connection to journalists’ external environment is made. It stresses the notion that journalists’ perceptions of an event do not take place in a vacuum but are influences by other factors such as audience perceptions and expectations on news coverage. Somewhere in the intersection between the media and society, an event becomes a crisis.

Both fields have made important contributions to the understanding of news production in general as well as during crises, but they also tend to show an absence of theoretical approaches that can provide guidelines on how news organizations cope with crisis events on an organizational level. This topic will be discussed in the final concluding paragraphs of this section.

Material and methods

General research design
The empirical material consists primarily of three case studies based on the actions taken at the Swedish Radio (SR), the Swedish Television (SVT) and TV4 the first hours after the September 11 attacks in 2001. The empirical materials have been applied somewhat differently in the four articles and for a more detailed account see the method sections in the articles.

Process tracing
Due to the lack of previous research on the topic, an empirical process tracing method was used as a first step and Appendix B should be understood against the backdrop of the necessity of providing empirical knowledge on the topic. This is based on the notion that it is hard to explain what has not yet been fully described (Merriam, 1994:46). The aim of the process tracing has been to identify the actions and decisions taken by each organization as well as to identify the actors involved in each organizational process.

The process tracing approach follows a method for crisis studies developed by Stern and Sundelius (2002). The first step in their approach is purely descriptive where the object is to establish a time frame and outline the course of the event. The next step is more analytical and consists of singling out the “decision making occasions” from the established time frame. Decision making occasions can be selected according to three criteria: firstly, prominence in the crisis decision making process (i.e. the problems that most troubled the decision makers and were the most time consuming); secondly, post hoc importance (i.e. problems or decisions that in retrospect proved to have an impact on the course of events); and thirdly, pedagogical value (i.e. episodes of best or worst practices that might constitute valuable lessons for further crises) (ibid,
For the use of this study, the first criterion has been applied, since the aim has been to describe the events as they were perceived by the actors themselves. “By breaking a historical crisis experience down into a series of decision occasions, complex decision making processes can be traced in relatively close approximation to the reality perceived by the participants themselves” (ibid). The process tracing illustrates the problems the actors confronted as well as empirical ‘puzzles’ posed by the cases.

The study has a comparative approach. George and Bennett (2004) argue that case studies have to be structured in the same way (e.g. the same type of questions should be posed to the empirics) in order to be comparative. Further, cases have to be focused based on theoretical arguments. When designed as described above, we have a so called “structured-focused comparison”, which basically means that data has been collected around similar variables in each of the cases. The design of the study can be said to be a structured-focused comparison since the interviews were all focused around the same clusters/themes (see Appendix D for interview scheme), which were selected based on cognitive-institutional theories, according to a framework for crisis management case studies developed by Eric Stern (2001).

The process tracing answered the descriptive question in terms of what happened, but in order to explain differences in outcomes additional approaches were needed. These approaches will be described in connection to the articles. In general, the case studies presented in the articles are all examples of what George and Bennett (2004) call “heuristic case studies” where the purpose is to “identify new variables, hypothesis, causal mechanisms, and causal paths” (p. 75). They rely upon “deviant” or “outlier” cases where outcomes cannot be explained by traditional theories in the field. Two of the articles in this dissertation are case studies questioning the notion of homogeneity across news organizations and they set out to explain the differences observed. Another article questions the notion of news media as solely a provider of information in times of crises, and finally, one article aims to explore how to define crisis events from a news organizational perspective.

Interviews

The study is based on interviews conducted with managers and editors in the three organizations (for a more detailed account see Appendix B). In addition, where such material existed and was accessible, e-mails sent by the actors the actual day as well as contingency plans has been consulted (even though TV4 was the only organization that said they used some sort of pre-established order in handling the event). Due to the lack of written sources, like plans or other documents explaining the actions taken by the news organizations in relation to September 11, interviews with key actors have been vital.

The research project started as a consulting report for the Swedish Radio on their organizational performance during the 9/11 attacks. The interviews for the report were made in January 2002.\(^{14}\) Based on the interviews made at SR, I decided to do a similar set of interviews at SVT and TV4. These interviews were made between November 2002 and mid February 2003. The interviews made in connection to the Anna Lindh murder were conducted in December 2003 and January 2004. The interviews did not only focus on the Anna Lindh case but also dealt with organizational changes made as a result of the terror attacks 9/11 in each of the organizations.

\(^{14}\) The interviews were conducted for the project by the author and Edward Deverell, a Crismart colleague and PhD candidate at Utrecht University in Public Administration (two of the interviews were conducted by Anders Johansson, a Swedish National Defence colleague and PhD candidate at Örebro University). The same interview guide was used and all interviews were taped and then transcribed.
The main part of the interviews focused on actions and decisions taken in connection to the first hours after the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. At SVT and SR, both managers and editors/producers were interviewed (44 at SR and 31 at SVT). At TV4, only the managerial group, consisting of six people, was interviewed (and one person responsible for commercials). As can be seen above, the numbers and levels of people interviewed differed between the three organizations. The reason was simply that it took much longer to get hold of people than expected and in particular so at TV4. However, TV4 is a far simpler and smaller organization than the other two, which suggests that further interviewing would not have provided much additional material (as compared to SR and SVT). The interviews made after the murder of the Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh on September 11, 2003, consisted of: the Directors of programs at SR; the Director of current affairs at TV4; and the Director of planning, the Director of news and current affairs, the Head of news, the Head of the extra broadcasting organization, and the editor of the extra broadcasting organization — all at SVT. The interviews took around one hour and were all, except for two interviews, made in the interviewee’s offices. All interviews have been transcribed.

As already mentioned, the interviews were structured and focused around certain themes that made the interviewees talk about organizational and individual responses. Thus the interviews had a high degree of openness, where the overarching question was “what did you do when you found out that a plane had crashed into the Word Trade Center?” The interviewees were then encouraged to tell their own story as far as they were able to remember it. Follow-up questions were posed based on the interviewees’ stories, both on interesting perspectives brought up by the interviewee(s) and on themes from the interview guide. It should thus be said that the interviewees most of the time brought up the themes from the interview guide themselves as a part of their personal story. The interviews tried to capture both the actual actions taken and the perceptions of the situation. The open ended questions made it possible for the interviewees to focus on what they themselves thought of as being important.

Semi-structured interviews were used since they provide a possibility for interviewees to talk about problems in a way that is meaningful for them (Laukkanen, 1998:176). Open-ended interviews are in general beneficial as a way of capturing organizational values and cultures, since they encourage interviewees to unravel aspects of their everyday life in their particular cultural settings (Sackmann, 1991). Furthermore, according to Beach (1997), narrative storytelling is a good way of singling out aspects that might influence decision making, since these aspects tend to be an important part of the stories told by the interviewees.

In my view, narratives hold the key to progress in studying decision making. They encompass the past, the present and the future. They provide a platform for expression of the decision maker’s principles. They are colored by assumptions about social norms and interpersonal expectations. They may well be the primarily vehicle for both understanding and decision making, in which decisions grow naturally from the progressive development of the narrative (Beach, 1997:193).

It was evident in the interviews made for this study that the interviewees, when describing the decision making, also talked about the principles and norms underpinning their actions.

On a methodological basis, there are some general problems with interviews as empirical material, which ought to be highlighted. Firstly, interviews are dynamic and rely upon an interplay between the researcher and the interviewee, with an inherent risk that the researcher might influence the interviewees in different ways. The interviewee might for example start to understand the event in a different way during the interview (Eden and Ackerman, 1998:193).
Secondly, interviews risk changing character when the researcher learns more about the event. This was evident in my own work, where questions to the interviewees became finely tuned and more detailed with time (even though it is not considered to be a major problem in the study). Thirdly, since interviews are dynamic, they can not be replicated in exactly the same way, and this might pose problems when comparing interviews (Huber and Power, 1985; Schwenk, 1986). The issue of systematic comparability has thus not been a major drawback in relation to this study due its theoretical perspective.

Another potential problem with using interviews as empirical material is the natural tendency for interviewees to forget details about the event. As already mentioned, the interviews were conducted at different points in time, and this means that some interviews might be more biased than others in terms of memory limitations. Another risk is that informants might portray their own actions in a more meritorious way than was the actual case. That can be done either by interviewees’ emphasizing their own behavior in a way that is disproportional, or by not mentioning eventual mistakes. Interviewees might either paint the actions of others in black or in a rosier picture than is motivated. The above mentioned methodological problems have in this dissertation been dealt with through systematic and detailed comparisons of statements to one another. Statements have further been compared to how well they fitted into the result of the actual decision making processes, in forms of the broadcasting schedules for each station.

Despite the problems with relying upon interviews as empirical material, it would have been impossible to conduct the study in any another way, since there were no written accounts of what had happened that day. This is a general problem for researchers interested in decision making processes, since these processes in general are hard to observe as they happen the researcher is left with retrospective interviews (Schwenk, 1986; Mintzberg, 1973; Hickson et al., 1986).

Summary of the articles

Article I: Research on news organization’s handling of a ‘what-a-story’ proposes that journalists find routines for handling these events based on their previous experiences of similar situations. Still, conceptual discussions on how to define extraordinary events or what-a-stories has so far attracted limited interest. As a response, this article proposes a definition of a what-a-story in order to provide an understanding of which events that become part of news organizations’ historical case banks. Accordingly, the aim of the article is to present a definition of crisis news events from an organizational perspective, which can help distinguish critical events for news organizations’ learning and preparedness. The article argues for crisis news to be understood as surprise events that challenge key organizational values, and demand a swift response. Based on interviews with Swedish broadcasting media managers, the article illustrates how the September 11 terror attacks can be defined as a crisis event.

Article II: The starting point for this article is the notion that research on news organization would benefit from steering away from previous reliance on structural and bureaucratic routines in explaining organizational crisis decision making. As a way of moving beyond the previous focus on homogeneity in news organizations responses; a neo-institutional framework is proposed. The article consists of a case study on management decision making during September 11, 2001 in three Swedish broadcasting organizations: Swedish Radio (SR); Swedish Television (SVT); and TV4. In this article I aim to explain why two of the managerial bodies (SR and TV4)
made scheduling decisions that never had been applied before as a response to the terror attack, whereas SVT chose to broadcast according to their previous established policy on extraordinary events. In the context of organizational ‘rule regimes’, the article examines the reason for news organizations adopting routine or inspirational decisions.

**Article III:** By comparing two newsrooms’ responses to the terror attacks of 9/11, this article demonstrates that newsrooms, in contrast to what previous research tells us, differ in their ability to cover crises events. Drawing upon findings from previous research on how news organizations cope with extraordinary - and crisis - events, the study explains news desks’ ability to cope with the disruptions of everyday deadlines caused by ‘disaster marathon modes’ of reporting, based on organizational everyday structures and previous experiences. The results of this study suggest that the news desk with a mechanistic everyday structure, tended towards more centralized responses in the wake of the event (which facilitated the response). Whereas the news desk with a pragmatic everyday structure, further decentralized its response (thereby hampering the response). Furthermore, in relation to the role of previous experiences, the news desk with the mechanistic everyday structure had institutionalized previous experiences. This became a resource bank to draw upon in managing the event. However, the news desk with the pragmatic structure had no experiences to mitigate the effects of the organizational design.

**Article IV:** The mass media are expected to play a key role in providing relevant and accurate information during a crisis. While numerous studies of crisis communication have explored how well the media perform in providing information during crises, less attention has been given to journalism’s ritual aspects, such as those related to remembering, celebrating, mourning and sharing among members of a community. In the cultural tradition, journalism is as much about ritual and meaning-making as it is about providing information. One of the most important ways of performing this ritual function is through live, on-the-spot journalism - a form of journalism that has becoming increasingly common due to technological developments and at the very least, it is connected with crisis news coverage. Based on interviews with broadcast media journalists about their decision making strategies and motives during two crises, (11 September 2001 and the Anna Lindh murder in 2003), the co-author and I link crisis communication with journalism’s ritual and symbolic functions and argue. We argue that key journalistic strategies such as immediacy and competition are motivated just as much by rituals related to affirming community and journalistic organizational needs as by informational motivations. We conclude by suggesting that in times of crisis, the roles of psychologist, comforter and co-mourner should be considered journalistic role conceptions especially in a live, 24-hour news culture.

Explaining Swedish broadcasting organizations’ crisis decision making – Reflections and findings

The purpose of this concluding section is to discuss the findings from the articles in relation to the gaps identified in the literature review. This will partly be done against the backdrop of previous research in crisis management, which has been a vital source of inspiration where aspects such as sense making, decision making and learning have played an important role in shaping my understanding of crises as an object of study (Boin et al., 2005). One of the main
influential sources has been the cognitive-institutional model of crisis decision making elaborated by political scientist Eric Stern (2001).\textsuperscript{15}

According to Stern (2001) the cognitive-institutional approach to crisis decision making urges researchers to pay attention to: the context in which crisis decision making takes place, especially in terms of organizational/individual history/previous experiences; the individual’s definitions and interpretations of the problem at hand; and crisis decision making as a process (pp. 43-44). The central notion in the model is to understand individual perceptions and actions in their organizational context, which simultaneously enables and constrains crisis decision making.

This section will be devoted to a discussion of the articles, which from different perspectives explore news organizational actions in connection to crisis events. Broadly speaking the articles pose questions such as: what practices are applied in crisis events?; how can they be explained?; and do they vary between different news organizational managerial groups and newsrooms? By asking these questions, news organizational practices become connected to specific organizational settings, values, individual perceptions, and experiences.

**News organizations**

**News organizations’ norms and decision making logics**

As demonstrated in the literature review, news organizations have in general been regarded as consisting of universal norms and cultures. Comparative research challenging this notion has been scarce. This dissertation has demonstrated that news organizations do vary when it comes to norms, routines, and cultures and consequently these differences have an affect on their crisis decision making. This topic is mainly dealt with in Article II. The theoretical starting point for the article is James March’s (1994) so called logic of appropriateness, in which he argues for decision making processes to be based on “establishing identities and matching rules to recognized situations” (p. 58). The logic of appropriateness then asks questions of: recognition (what kind of person am I?); of identity (what kind of organization is this?); and of rules (what does a person such as I, or an organization such as this, do in a situation such as this?) (March, 1981:228; March, 1994:58). Put together, the answers to these questions create a coherent organizational pattern of decision making; a certain organizational “rule regimes” (Burns and Flam, 1987:41-42) or “decision making logic” (Heyse, 2006).

To date, research on news organizations’ decision making has been limited (Donsbach, 2004; Berkowitz, 1997), even though some work has been done on more strategic long-term change processes within media companies.\textsuperscript{16} For example, Dag Björkegren (2001) argues from the viewpoint of business economy that the differences between news organizations strategic decision making styles can be explained by a classical distinction between commercial and political organizations. He states that even though SVT is not a political organization in itself, its principals are politicians, which draw SVT into a political environment in terms of its overarching strategies and organizational changes. One distinction between the two types of

\textsuperscript{15} Stern (2001) summarizes the cognitive-institutional framework as consisting of the following aspects. 1) Cognition including emphasis on subjectivity and representation; beliefs, expectations, and agenda shaping; limited information processing capacity; heuristics and shortcuts; cognition and motivation; and stress. 2) Neo-institutionalism - middle level approach: groups, networks, organizations; Institutional structure and culture: rules, norms roles, routines; subjectivity: interpretation and problem framing; history and inheritance; politics within and across organizations; communication and symbolism (pp. 36-42).

\textsuperscript{16} Research on more strategic long-term changes in media organizations has not been accounted for in the literature review (see for example Syvertsen, 1997; Sondergaard, 1994). This is because it deals with different forms of decision making processes, involving other actors and conditions than the acute short-term type of decision making addressed in this study.
organizations is the tendency for commercial organizations to have a more action-oriented attitude and therefore ability for fast decision making. Furthermore, commercial organizations are in general better at showing unity and focus on clear goals, whereas political organizations tend to rely on an inquiry culture and in line with this to display organizational disunity and contradictive goals. As a result, organizational changes in political organizations are often the result of well thought-out and long decision making processes (ibid, pp. 276-277). In the same way, journalism scholar Anna Edin (1996) argues that SVT’s reliance on bureaucracy and complex processes make fast decision making problematic (p. 195). This can further be compared to how Harrison (2000) describes managerial decision making at the British Public Service Broadcasting Company (BBC) in terms of being “slow and ponderous” where “one producer [interviewee at BBC] drew the analogy of the BBC being like a huge oil tanker that would take ten miles just to stop” (p. 89).

How does then the distinction between political and commercial organizations correspond to decision making styles when comparing SVT, SR and TV4 crisis decision making? The study on TV4, which is a commercial channel, showed how the importance of flexibility and speed were stressed among the managers of the organization. In order to accomplish these goals, the interviewees emphasized the necessity of having a person serving as the head of the station with the ultimate responsibility for the organization’s crisis decision making. In contrast, the diffused mandates held by the SVT managerial group, as pointed out in Article II, are understandable in the light of political organizational cultures tendency to be less keen on, or not used to, speedy decision making. Still, the distinction between a commercial and a political organization does not hold true in explaining why the managerial group at SR took swift and decisive actions in the wake of September 11. The decision making style at SR was in fact much more similar to TV4 than to SVT, which goes against the notion of certain organizational logics based on stake-holder relations.

In fact, the findings indicated that more thorough comparative analyses of news organizations’ norms and cultures are needed, and such research to date has been scarce. One notable exception is Lucy Kün-Shankleman (2000) who did a study on how organizational cultures of BBC and CNN affected their strategic decision making that to some extent corresponded to the findings in this dissertation. For example, Kün-Shankleman emphasizes that what might be understood as organizational strengths or weaknesses is actually context bound. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that both the strong sense of organizational pride within the BBC as well as the CNN “under dog perspective” led to unintended consequences for the organizations’ ability to manage strategic challenges. “Pride is a somewhat negative characteristic at the BBC, inferiority a positive one at CNN” (Kün-Shankleman, 2000:202).

Interesting parallels can here be drawn to Article II; the self image of TV4 as an underdog is similar to how CNN was depicted. At TV4, this mentality fostered an organizational culture that emphasized speedy decision making and a high degree of flexibility as the main way to compete with the more resource rich SVT. In the case of TV4, decision making practices were closely connected to the notion of crisis events as challengers to the organization (as one of the crisis definition characteristics proposed in Article I). Considering that TV4 from the very start had far less resources than SVT and that the only way to compete was with organizational flexibility and speed, it should come as no surprise that TV4 was the only organization in the study with contingency planning. The station could simply not afford to miss out on one of

17 As mentioned in the literature review; media organizations tend to lack of contingency planning, and when they do not, it tend to be of poor quality (Quarantelli, 1996:5; 2002; 5).
these organizational legitimacy challenges defining crisis news events. In a similar manner, SVT can be compared to the BBC in having strong organizational confidence, which resulted in limited reflections and therefore no calls for policy changes on handling 9/11 in the acute crisis phase. On the other hand, SR had developed a culture based on repeated failures during previous crisis events, which fostered a deep-seated need to do better next time.

The article demonstrates that differences in organizational cultures can explain why news organizations make different decisions. For instance, TV4 and SR (for somewhat different reasons) questioned their previous policies and made ‘inspirational decisions’ (breaking away from previous policies), whereas SVT simply followed its previous policy. The findings (in particular, in the TV4 case) revealed that an innovative and flexible approach can be an organizational norm in itself (Silver and Mitchell, 1990:45). The inflexibility at SVT can rather be explained by the tendency for crisis prone organizations to define reality according to their own distorted perceptions, which hampers their ability to make a realistic assessment of the situation (Mitroff et al., 1989). Kets de Vries and Miller (1984), organizational-oriented psychoanalysts, argue that overly self-assured organizations tend to overlook internal and external organizational challenges.

Another example of organizational flexibility as a norm can be explained by newsrooms’ pre-existing structures (in terms of whether they have a mechanistic or pragmatic everyday structure) and their previous experiences from similar events (see Article III). The study demonstrates how SR’s news program Ekot managed to adjust to live broadcast, despite the disappearance of their everyday production deadlines. The flexible approach was facilitated by the centralization of decision making processes as well as institutionalized previous experiences, which had been incorporated into organizational norms. In contrast to Ekot, the pragmatic everyday organization of SVT 24 led to a decentralized response which hampered the newsrooms’ ability to cope with the event. Further, the news desk staff had no previous experience to compensate for the influence of the organizational everyday structure. Based on the article it can be concluded that every day organizational structures, norms and values affect news organizations’ crisis management, not only at the managerial level, but also at individual newsroom level.

According to the above discussion, organizational norms and structures do not only play an important role in news organizations’ long term strategic decision making (Küng-Shankleman, 2000), but also in acute crisis decision making. In relation to the previous reliance on universal routines in news work, the study underpins the need to redirect the focus of research in the field to diversity among news organizations (both at the managerial and newsroom levels), since comparative research will provide opportunities to distinguish which routines, norms and cultures are in fact universal and which are organizationally specific.

**Role conceptions and rituals**

Similar to the theoretical proposal I make in Article II, Ryfe (2006b) argues for applying the “logic of appropriateness” to the study of journalism, since it facilitates a better understanding of journalistic rules “as a normative assumption or expectation about appropriate or legitimate
modes of behavior—what a journalist’s role is, what his or her obligations are, what values and commitments are appropriate—in the context of news production” (p. 205). That quote is closely related to the central argument presented in Article IV, which focuses on journalistic role conceptions and ritual behavior during crisis events.

Article IV proposes that news organizations’ managers do not only make scheduling decisions based on the need to disseminate vital information to the public, but also on ritual aspects related to affirming community and news organizations’ needs. The media’s ritual role in terms of providing the audience with emotional support has also been acknowledged by other scholars in the field of journalism. One such observation in connection to September 11 was made by Pat Aufderheide (2002) professor in journalism, “It was a moment when the training of professional journalists to use skepticism in the service of accuracy clashed with the role of the only national mass media—the television network—to provide emotional reassurance” (p. 10). However, the role of rituals in news organizations’ crisis decision making has not been the object of systematic studies. For example, Harrington (1998) argues that both scholars and journalists have had limited or no interest in how the audience perceives non-routine reporting.

Based on the findings from Article IV, this claim is not supported since the imagined audience reception of news coverage was in fact an important aspect of media managers’ decision making. Another example of the importance of news organization’s role perception as companions and emotional supporters was the decision taken by SR Jönköping to break away from the P1 and P4 joint broadcast in order to provide local coverage. The Head of SR Jönköping motivated the decision by emphasizing the vital role local radio stations perform for their audiences during crises in terms of reassurance and comfort (see Appendix B). In line with this, I would argue that such an approach can help deepen the understanding of how the news media views its role in crises in relation to the audience and society in general, and, as stated in Article IV, this impacts managerial scheduling decisions. Studies on audience reactions to crisis news coverage further support the notion of the media as a provider of emotional support in times of crises. According to Marla Perez-Lugo (2004), the media’s emotional support was essential for people affected by Hurricane George in 199819. “During the impact of the hurricane, the media-audience relationship was motivated more by people’s need for emotional support, companionship, and community ties, than for their need for official information” (p. 219).

In general, the findings in Article IV confirm that media managers are well aware of and pay attention to the media’s ritual and symbolic role for audiences in time of crises. Further, at the same time the media provides emotional support for the audience, they also establish their own authority in being the central actors when crises strike society. In order to fulfill that role, news organizations need to be able to correctly analyze incoming information and take appropriate actions in accordance to their understanding of the situation. This is a delicate situation and it becomes particularly salient during extraordinary events such as crises. As emphasized by March (1991; 1994) the ability to act and to make the right decisions has a strong symbolic and ritual value for organizations. Even though rituals as a concept has attracted attention in journalism studies20, the reliance on routines and bureaucratic theory has made journalism researchers overlook the symbolic aspects when it comes to newsroom practices (Ehrlich, 1996:6).

19 The study is based on interviews with residents of eight communities in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico.
20 For example: Tuchman on objectivity as strategic rituals (1972); Ekström and Nohrstedt (1996) on journalism ethics; Dayan and Katz (1992) on media events; and Becker (1995) on public events.
Based on the dissertation findings, I would argue that ritual and symbolic perspectives helps to account for why many journalists perceived the situation in a positive way, despite the stress and increased work load created by the situation. For example, the Head of SR Jönköping described the situation in the following way:

This is a breath of life for good journalists. This is one of the most fun things you can do, no matter how strange it might sound. It is positive. No unnecessary stress. Lots of new and significant things happening that make journalists come alive and think life is fun. Life becomes meaningful.21

The ability to act in these kinds of situations determines an individual journalist’s virtue, but also that of entire newsrooms’ and news organizations’. The Head of Ekot describes the value of successful crisis management from a newsroom perspective and the devastating effects of an unsuccessful news response:

When a newsroom is faced with an incredible challenge and able to concentrate all of its resources in doing a well-defined job, everyone realizes that this is the reason we are here. Having the opportunity to do this and getting a confirmation that the work was done well means we have succeeded in doing our jobs. That is a very, very positive experience and a newsroom can live on that for a long time. On the other hand, a newsroom that has failed can get into a slump which can be very hard to get out of. That happened to SVT, and it did not cope with it well. They made lots of mistakes and have been suffering ever since.

To sum up, ritual aspects of crisis coverage are not only related to the relation between the audience and the media but also explain the actions and decision making of news organizations from an insider perspective.

A holistic take on news organizations
As pointed out in the literature review, calls for a holistic approach in studying news organizations have been made by a number of journalism scholars (for example Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Ehrlich, 1996; Hirsch, 1977). What then is the added value of examining news organizations as a whole, based on the findings from this dissertation?

For a start, previous research on news production has been focused on the newsroom level, overlooking the fact that in real big crisis events, the managerial level becomes involved in operational news work since such events require changes in program scheduling as well as organizational re-structuring. This study shows how decisions taken at the managerial level (for example, in terms of scheduling changes) deeply affected the working conditions in the newsrooms.

It was evident that some of the newsrooms had a hard time coping with the new circumstances imposed by the managerial decisions. For instance, some of the SVT programs such as sports, culture, and local news found it difficult to adjust their news coverage to the terror attacks and in many cases would have preferred not to broadcast at all. This dissertation highlights the difficulties SVT 24 experienced in dealing with reporting the first few critical hours after the attack and the fact that the organizational policy at SVT (i.e., to focus its resources on the ordinary news programs) did not facilitated this process. Managerial decisions at SR resulted in the fact that Ekot and Studio ett were reorganized in order to run an eight hour long broadcast, which required a lot of energy and resources from the two news desks. However, managerial decisions were also influenced by the newsrooms’ ability to change format, or in some cases,

21 This statement can be compared to how Schlesinger (1977) describes journalists’ reactions to “spot news” (see page 27 in this dissertation).
their inability. For example, one of the reasons why SVT took a break from their reporting on the terror attacks was due to the fact that the Aktuell program was unable to cope with the prolonged broadcast. Yet, it is equally important to note that managerial bodies do not always have the power to control everything that is happening within the organization. The most startling example of this is the decision made by SR Jönköping to broadcast despite the Directors of programs’ decision not to broadcast local material.

The findings above illustrate the importance of paying attention to the interaction between different parts of organizations in understanding what causes them to act in different ways. On a more theoretical level, a holistic approach to news organizations opens further examination of the concept of routines at various organizational levels. As already touched upon, it is fair to assume that the heavy reliance on routines in previous research on news work can be attributed to the focus on the operational newsroom level since routines tend to be more salient in an operational setting than in a strategic one. This was also obvious when comparing the newsroom level to the managerial level; actions of newsrooms differed less in terms of potential lines of action, which is natural since they perform more operational routine tasks in comparison to the managerial groups.

Still, the empirical data points out the risk of taking for granted that routine responses (here defined as programmed decisions) are necessarily connected to a certain organizational level. According to Herbert Simon (1960/1977), programmed decisions are characterized by problems that have been encountered before, and to which an automatic response can be applied, and non-programmed decisions are characterized by problems that have not been encountered before and accordingly require more of an innovative response. The process tracing analysis performed in this study shows how decision making in news organizations during crisis events can be programmed or not-programmed irrespectively of the organizational level. For example, the SVT management group had a programmed response, whereas the SVT 24 newsroom did not. On the other hand, the SR management group made non-programmed decisions, while the Ekot newsroom made programmed decisions. The observation stresses the importance of perception and history in news organizations’ research during crisis events and the need to place more emphasis on the dynamics and complexity in different news organizations’ responses.

Individual journalists in news organizations

**Journalists as decision makers**

As discussed in the literature review section, previous research on news work has, as expressed by Cottle (2003), tended to position journalists as “mere supports or bearers of the organizational system, rather then as active and thinking agents who purposefully produce news through their professional practices” (p. 22). This approach goes against the basic assumption provided by the cognitive-institutional model, which acknowledges individuals as actors in their own right even though they are situated in an organizational setting that influences their choices for action.

An anecdotal example of the interplay between organizational norms and individual actions for crisis outcomes in news organizations was evident after the assassination of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986. The delay in reporting the event was depicted as a

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Berthon et al. (2001) explain well the significance in this difference. “Perceiving a problem as strategic will emphasize long-term implications, as well as stress the effect of the problem on the organization as a whole and its consequences for competing positions. In contrast, perceiving a problem as operational will tend to emphasize short-term localized implications and focus attention on specific actions to be taken (p. 139).”
failure for the news media in Sweden in general and at SR in particular since it took two hours
before news of the assassination was actually broadcasted. Embarrassingly enough the news even
appeared in American news media before it was broadcasted by Ekot. According to Lindahl
(1986) there were mainly two factors that caused the delay; SR had no operational news desk
during the night, and the printer room in which TT messages arrived was only checked
sporadically and not at all on the actual night. An extra news cast was finally broadcasted due to
the fact that off-duty reporters heard of the news on other channels and then voluntarily made
their way to the Radio House. The case illustrates that there are good reasons to examine the
interplay of organizational routines and individual actions in understanding news organizational
behavior in connection to certain key events.

The assumption is reinforced by the findings in Article II; the news organizations differed
in how much room was provided for individual action based on their organizational cultures and
managerial mandates. Both in the case of TV4 and SR the managerial bodies perceived their
mandates to be stronger than SVT’s managerial body did, and this provided more room for
maneuvering. At TV4, the managerial group had by tradition a strong formal position, whereas
the decision making body at SR was an ad-hoc response to the situation. The transformation of
the organizational structure can be understood in terms of Mintzberg’s (1983) “crisis
organization”: an ad-hoc centralized organization set up since “the need for fast, coordinated
responses puts power in the hands of the chief executives and serves to reduce the degree of
bureaucratization” (p. 160). In line with Mintzberg, one of the main motives for the SR Directors
of programs to centralize the organization was to overcome everyday bureaucracy, which had
perceivably hampered previous crisis reporting. One result of this was the disappearance of the
Heads of P1 and P4 from the SR decision making structure. Interestingly enough, the Heads of
channels agreed that previous crisis reporting had been less successful and therefore accepted the
centralization of power, arguing that the joint program would never have been realized if they
would have had to negotiate between themselves. These findings correspond to previous research
on crisis management in political settings; which state that crises are often handled by small ad-
hoc groups, as a way of overcoming time consuming and tiresome bureaucratic routines
(Sundelius et al., 1997: ´t Hart et al., 1997). Based on the discussion above, it is reasonable to
argue that groups consisting of key individuals can under certain circumstances have a profound
impact on news organizations responses.

Development and change of routines
As noted in the literature review, previous research has not traditionally focused on issues related
to development and modifications of journalistic routines. As a response to this, Ryfe (2006b)
encourages journalism researchers to start asking questions related to the origin of journalistic
routines and how they are applied in different settings. In general it can be argued that the limited
attention paid to journalists as actors has contributed to the tendency to view news organization
routines as static, and accordingly issues concerned with changes in journalistic practices have
been neglected (for an exception see Zelizer, 1993a; 1993b). Another contributing factor to this
knowledge gap might be the lack of news production research on the managerial level, since
organizational research shows, not surprisingly, that top management teams play a special role in
organizational change (Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996). Individuals occupying top positions have more authority to impose changes and to break away
from established norms in the organizational field. Likewise, they have more resources and better
knowledge of the organization and its environment which contributes to identifying new
organizational models (Battilana, 2006:666).
The new practices developed by the TV4 and SR managerial groups in the midst of the crisis have already been discussed, and emphasis the notion of big news events as crucial in altering and modifying news organizations’ practices. In contrast to previous research on ‘what-a-story’, an interesting point is not the extent to which these events are dealt with by the help of routines but rather their potentials as challengers to routines. This is the moment when existing routines are put to the test, when some are abandoned and others created.

This dissertation demonstrates how the abandonment of previous policies at TV4 and SR were deliberate decisions made by the top managers, since they felt the situation was too demanding to be handled by the pre-existing policies. Further, the innovative scheduling decision in turn encouraged the newsrooms involved in actual broadcasting to develop new practices matching the organizations’ new format. According to organizational scholar Feldman (2000), routines have the potential to become a much richer and dynamic concept if not separated from their agents (the people performing them). Accordingly, she advocates a “performative model” of organizational routines, understood as “a flow that included the broad range of thoughts, feelings and actions that people experience as they engage in work” (p. 622). Routines are performed by actors with the possibility to reflect upon them and as a result make changes and modification according to their intentions.

However, new practices are not only born in the eye of the storm but changes can also take place in the learning process after a crisis. One empirical example mentioned in this dissertation is the case of SVT and how it perceived September 11 as a ‘short-time disaster news’ event, only to change its understanding of the event in the aftermath of the crisis after receiving feedback on its performance from external critics and the audience. In some cases, a crisis can actually be understood as such after its acute phase, when organizational efforts are being evaluated and benchmarked. At SVT, the post-crisis evaluations lead to a re-orientation of crisis broadcasting policies and following that an extensive restructuring of the crisis organization.

The reorientation of policies can be attributed to changes in SVT’s role conception, where the ritual values performed by the station in times of crisis were put into focus. The new approach focused on showing a presence and replaced the former policy of prioritizing work with journalistic products broadcasted at the ordinary newscast times. SVT’s reorientation should be understood against the backdrop of the media’s ritual aspirations in uniting the public during crises and, by doing so, enforcing the role of the news organization as a central actor in society. A precondition for that to happen is that the audience’s and the media’s perceptions of an event correspond. This further emphasizes the importance of not viewing news organizations as closed systems, but rather in relation to their audience, critics and other news organizations, where external feedback is one way for developing new routines (Levitt and March, 1988). Changing practices can very well be a deliberate decision to cope with a new type of situation, for which the existing routines are not considered suitable. In order to better understand why decision

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23 The organizational changes imposed as a result of 9/11 were discussed by the SVT staff members when interviewed in connection to the murder of Anna Lindh in September 2003. Additional material in the form of e-mails and evaluations discussing organizational changes as a response to 9/11 has been consulted.

24 As stated by the Director of news and current affairs in the ‘weekly newsletter’ (translated e-mail dated 14 November 2001), “Our ordinary news programs had the largest part of the audience day one [9/11], but TV4 had more viewers than they normally have during big news events”. According to MMS (Mediamätning i Skandinavien) SVT had altogether 40.4% of the audience and TV4 37.9% during September 11, 2001 (September 12 - SVT 51.6% and TV4 26.7%, and September 13 -SVT 51.7% and TV4 23.7%).

25 As early as September 14, 2001, the Director of News and current affairs came to the conclusion concerning SVT’s 9/11 coverage that “We [SVT] ran into difficulties concerning the emotional aspects, in terms of offering a sense of comfort and reassurance” (translated e-mail dated 14 November 2001).
makers make adjustments to existing practices, and in which situations, it is vital to understand how they judge the situation at hand, which is the topic for the next section.

**Sense making**

A central aspect in crisis management research is the notion of sense making. How actors perceive their options in a decision making situation is essential. According to March (1994): “Not all alternatives are known, they must be sought; not all consequences are known, they must be investigated; not all preferences are known, they must be explored and evoked” (p. 23). In other words, how decision makers allocate their attention has clear effects on the actions chosen. Cognitive research has had a strong influence in organizational studies, where research has focused on identifying mental processes and their impact on decision making by focusing on aspects like information processing, perception and memory (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Weick, 1995; Weick, 1988). The concept of sense making is important in understanding a crisis as it unfolds and its dynamics. Furthermore, sense making has also proven to be pivotal for understanding crisis management in public and private sector organizations (see for example Boin et al., 2005; Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer, 2003; Wooten and James, 2008). In the field of emergency management, research on naturalistic decision making has significantly examined how decision makers recognize and respond to unstructured decision making situations (Flin, 1996; Beach, 1997; Klein, 1993).

As illustrated in the literature review, the notion of categorization has been widely applied in journalism research. Article I takes a somewhat similar starting point in arguing that some extremely big news events could be classified as crisis news events. Based on the empirical material in this study, the question is posed on what makes certain events similar in the minds of the media managers despite the fact that they differ in content (e.g. events such as the murder of the former Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, the sinking of the passenger ferry Estonia, or the Gothenburg discotheque fire). The definition applied in this study is based on the following three elements: surprise, threat to organizational values, and limited decision making time (Seeger, Sellnow and Umer, 1998). The proposed definition aims to bring together the news sociologists’ definition of ‘what-a-story’, which is based on journalists’ perception of news events in terms of different categories, with the crisis and disaster scholars’ interests in events that are traumatic and disastrous from a societal perspective.

In relation to the research on news categorization, which argues that journalists categorize news events as a way of controlling their workload, I argue that crisis events are the moments when media managers confront deep uncertainties on how to control their work and that these are the moments when routine practices get challenged. According to crisis management researchers Boin et al. (2005), crises are events that create profound uncertainties. At the individual level, these situations give rise to cognitive conflicts as long as people “still believe in the ‘normal’ order but they confront repeated and undeniable information that things are seriously wrong” (p. 71). Crisis events can then be understood as ‘frame-breaking’ events in which the event clashes with the old world order. As such, these are the moments when news organizations’ sense-making capabilities are put to the test and consequently, failures are devastating to an organization.

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26 The majority of cognitive research has been dominated by experimental studies conducted on inexperienced decision makers solving fabricated problems. Research on naturalistic decision making has been a way to try to steer away from experimental research and to understand emergency decision making in real life situations.

27 It should be noted that similar crisis definitions have been previously proposed within the field of political science. Hermann’s definitions from 1963/1972 is commonly referred to: 1) threatens high priority goals of the decision unit, 2) restricts the amount of time available before the decision is transformed, and 3) surprises the members of the decision unit by its occurrence” (p.13). The notion of threat in terms of “high priority goals” was later replaced with the term “important values” by Holsti (1972:9).
organization’s self-image. On the other hand, success in these kinds of situations is invaluable to news organizations’ self-esteem, since these are the very moments defining the core of journalism as a profession (to which the ability to understand and explain the world is essential).

Even though it might not have been Tuchman’s (1973) intention, previous research on categorization tends to perceive journalists as a collective and consequently, categorization was understood as journalistic routine practice. As a result of this heavy reliance on journalistic routines, issues related to individual journalists’ sense making and decision making have received limited attention (Donsbach, 2004, Stocking and Gross, 1989). In contrast, this dissertation has illustrated that journalists’ and media managers’ framings of an event do not always correspond to one another or to the collective, and that these differences sometimes have significant consequences for decision making. In Article II, I have discussed the implications that different perceptions can have on managerial scheduling decisions.

The results from that study revealed how the SR management group understood from the very beginning that 9/11 was a once-in-a-life-time news event. The quick decision made by the SR Directors of programs to change the broadcasting schedule was influenced by the Head of Ekot, who presented the event as potentially the worst case - the beginning of a world war. This highlights the fact that crisis perception is often influenced by personal interactions and discussions within decision making groups (Stern, 2001). Further, as emphasized in, for example, research on naturalistic decision making, actors tend to pay attention to specific information clues in sizing up a situation (Klein, 1993). For instance, the TV4 managerial group perceived the event as critical after seeing the collapse of the two towers broadcasted on CNN. As expressed by one of the managers, “At that moment all of us realized what an immense catastrophe this was.” SR’s and TV4’s perceptions of the event as extremely serious were directly related to the decisions to broadcast extended live programs.

In contrast, SVT perceived the situation as a type of ‘disaster event’ with a short life period. The disaster event categorization accordingly affected the decision on how to cover the event, resulting in the fact that SVT allocated most its resources to news programs summing up and explaining the event. This reminds me of the observation made by Berkowitz (1992) that news organizational demands have an effect on how news workers typify events, which in the mentioned case study made journalists see a plane crash rather then a hotel fire, since they were better prepared to deal with the first type of event (p. 93). To sum up, this dissertation demonstrates that perception was closely linked to decision making in all three organizations, which emphasized the role of sense making for managerial decision making (in this case, program scheduling and organizational restructuring).

The decisions taken by the managerial group also had a strong communicative effect within the organizations. One example is the Head of P4 who stated that the decision made by the SR managerial group about running a live joint program was pivotal for her understanding of the seriousness of the situation. Also the editor-in-chief at SR Örebro stressed the importance of the decision taken at SR for her understanding of the situation. She argued that if the managerial group had not taken the decision, Radio Örebro had run the risk of not making enough changes in their broadcasts, since they might not have grasped the magnitude of the event (see Appendix B).

These examples demonstrate the symbolic power of scheduling decision making in signaling that something extraordinary has happened, not only to the audience, but also within the organization. Further, many of the interviewees stressed the importance of general media coverage for their understanding of the event. One example of this was the Head of technique and development at SR P4, who described how he understood the magnitude of the event first when he switched on the TV, which he did after he started working with the news.
As can be seen from the discussion above, individual sense making was often influenced by other people’s interpretations of the situation at hand, such as the decisions taken within the organization as well as other media reports of the event. Another vital source in interpreting information and making sense of an event is previous experiences. This is the topic discussed in the following final paragraphs of this section.

**Experiences and historical analogies**

As argued by news sociologists, categorization is not only about deciding on the type of news event, but also about connecting the perception of the event with appropriate journalistic practices – referred to as “typification” (Tuchman, 1973). One of the main explanations for how journalists manage to cope with “what-a-story” is that they rely on previous experiences from similar what-a-story events in knowing the appropriate response (Tuchman, 1973; Berkowitz, 1992). The role of experience in deciding actions in situations characterized by uncertainty and the need for speedy decision making is likewise emphasized by emergency management scholars. Cognitive psychologist Gerry Klein started his research on fire fighters being intrigued by the fact that fire fighters did not feel that they themselves made decisions or even considered different alternatives for action. Rather, “they saw themselves as acting and reacting on the basis of previous experiences” (Klein, 1993:139). This process of quickly recognizing and finding the appropriate response can be thought of in terms of intuition. According to scholars interested in the role of intuition in decision making; decision makers understand their environment based on experiences from previous situations, which makes them recognize patterns considerably faster than would had been possible otherwise (Isenberg, 1984; Clarke and Mackaness, 2001; Klein, 1993). According to Klein (1993: preface), experiences are crucial to emergency management decision making since that is “the way we translate our experience into action”. The role of historical analogies to previous encountered events in crisis decision making has also been acknowledged by researchers interested in political decision making (May, 1973; Khong, 1992; Brändström et al., 2004; Stern, 2001).

As stated in the literature review, there is a tendency within journalism research to understand previous experiences as belonging to journalists as a collective and not to individual journalists. Similarly, this dissertation shows that experience does play an important role but that these experiences are highly contextual, and as such differ due to organizational settings and individual journalists. In relation to this, Article II demonstrates how organizational lessons learned from previous events varied between the organizations in question, and between the managers responsible for the organizational responses to the event. The dissertation illustrates how previous experiences can shape crisis responses in two different ways: as a way of repeating former routines or experiences (Roux-Dufort and Vidallet, 2003:103) or as a precondition for improvisation (Weick, 1993). In the case of SR, due to its organizational memory of previous failures during crisis events, analogies became a source of knowledge in terms of how *not* to respond. In particular, one of the Directors of programs referred to a previous big news event and the fact that she did mistakenly not allocated enough time for covering the event, and consequently this became an important precondition to the decision to do an extended live program covering the terror attacks. Further, organizational stories about previously less successful responses to crisis events (such as the murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986 and the sinking of the passenger ferry Estonia in 1994) was a recurrent feature in many of the interviews conducted. Based on this, one can argue that SR’s decision to break away from its past resulted in, what Article II refers to as, an ‘inspirational decision’.
TV4, in contrast to the two other stations, displayed a systematic way of lesson learning from previous experiences, which resulted in the establishment of a contingency plan aimed at fostering flexibility. On the other hand, SVT had institutionalized experiences into a set policy on how to cope with big news events. It is then demonstrated in the article how history was applied in different ways, where some historical analogies created innovative and creative elements (as in SR and TV4) and where other previous experiences resulted in a set policy for how to deal with big news events (SVT). News organizations then draw upon experiences in different ways, from a clear cut ‘this is what we should do because this is how it has always been done’ to ‘let’s use elements of previous responses but add new elements’ to ‘let’s do the opposite to what we have always done’.

In addition, experiences and historical analogies also varied depending on organizational divisions; Article III shows the importance of experience at the newsroom level. In contrast to the tendency within existing news production research, the article demonstrates that newsrooms differ in their ability to handle crisis events. The article emphasizes the role of experiences, or the lack of it in this case, in explaining how a station like SVT 24, which was built for 24 hour news reporting, perceived the handling of the event as ‘chaotic’. Another example taken from the Appendix B is the differences between the regional news programs. For instance, SVT’s ABC News28 expressed difficulties in adjusting their regional coverage to the events, and the Head of SR Örebro expressed the same doubt concerning the stations ability to cope with a big international news event of this magnitude, if they had chosen to also broadcast. In contrast, SR Jönköping felt confident in their reporting (which they even took on voluntarily), based on the station’s previous experiences in adjusting their coverage to big international events. Finally, it should be noted that many of the respondents (at all levels within the organizations) stressed how they learned the ropes of crisis broadcasting from their more experienced colleagues, in terms of stories they had been told or by directly observing and participating in previous crisis broadcasts.

In short, previous research on news production has made important contributions in acknowledging the role of history in journalists’ categorization and typification of news events in general. Yet, the dissertation at hand argues that the same event might in fact give rise to different types of lessons learned across news organizations, since organizations and individuals interpret and institutionalize their history in a contextual way. One might argue that news organizations’ previous experiences have different degrees of commonality; big news events are more likely categorized in a similar manner whereas historical analogies on how to handle them are more likely to be organizational specific.

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There is no doubt that previous research on organizational news production has made important contributions in mapping out the basic structure of news work in aspects such as categorization of news and news organizational routines. In addition, scholars interested in the roles and functions of the media in the wake of crises and disasters have provided us with valuable insights into how the media in general operates during such circumstances. In this dissertation, however, I urge scholars studying news production to widen their scope in order to include the diverse actions of news organizations, at least in relation to crisis news events. As discussed in the final discussion

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28 ABC-news is a local news program covering Stockholm and Uppsala.
and in the articles in this dissertation, there are many possible routes to be taken for someone who wants to pursue this task, and here I outline some of the main findings from the dissertation.

For a start, beyond the overarching purpose of producing and delivering news, each news organization displays unique characteristics based on its own history, norms, values, and even organizational sub-units. Thus, news organizations can choose different routes for achieving the overarching goal of delivering news, and these routes are often context and path dependent. In order to better understand the actions of news organizations, all of these relevant elements should be examined.

In line with this, each organization has its own unique characteristics, and every organization is comprised of individuals. In connection to this, this dissertation highlights the role of managers in crisis responses and media managerial bodies as a topic for research. After all, top managers are the ones determining an organization’s priorities and strategies for news coverage. In doing so, they also play an important part in the symbolic and ritual aspects that the media performs during crisis. Organizational structure and norms can determine and define the roles these individuals assume, yet individuals do not always act in accordance to the established formal structures. An individual’s perceptions of a situation and previous experiences are also influential factors. Based on observations documented in this dissertation, I conclude that individuals, being both constrained and enabled by their organizational settings, play a vital role in determining the course organizations take during crises.

In order to fully understand an event and its outcome, we need to try to get into the heads of the people confronting the events and making the decisions and understand how they interpreted the signals about the event and how they understood their role within their organizational setting. In this dissertation, I have tried to demonstrate that sense making in news organizations is a very delicate matter and that news events can not simply be reduced to categorizing universal routines, especially not in the case of a crisis event. Journalists are just human beings and they too have to interpret signals in order to make sense of an event. And like all other human beings, journalists are affected by other people’s, and even other media’s, perceptions of a situation. Further, crisis events are very specific moments of sense making and can be described as ‘frame breaking events’: radically challenging our everyday assumptions about the world. This is why these events often call for ‘frame-breaking’ practices, because they challenge the established assumptions of news production.

The issues mentioned above are diverse, complex and broad, and it is not my intention to propose a comprehensive research plan on how to approach them all. However, I hope that this dissertation has contributed to the highlighting of some complexities related to media production that I felt were missing when I started this journey.