



When Rules Clash with Reality

an epistemological study of military professionalism

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The Swedish Centre for Studies of Armed Forces and Society = www.csms.se

Overarching research themes:

- Perspectives on the profession: organisation, structure and power relationships
- Experience-based knowledge in crisis and conflict-ridden environments
- Modern military professionalism
- Democratic control and civil–military relations



Organisational Trends

The Audit Society – evaluation and reviews are initiated from above and outside

The Measure Society – focuses on what is visible and measurable, such as indicators, comparisons



New Public Management – financial control, value for money, customer service – *happy or not?*



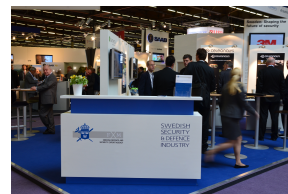
Forms of Knowledge

Theoretical Knowledge

Practical Knowledge

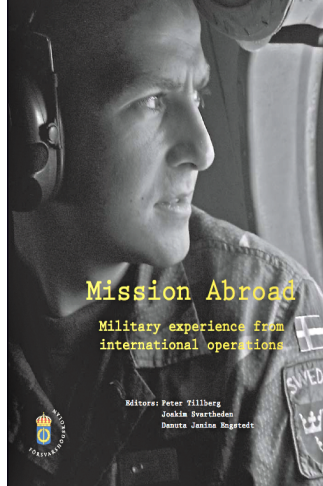
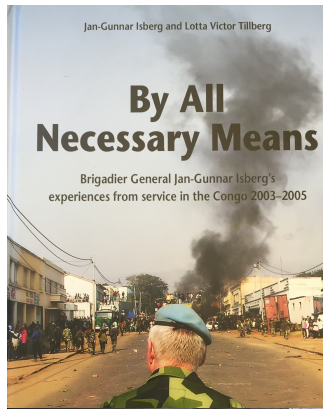
Knowledge of Familiarity

Praxis/Tacit Knowledge



The “Mission” Anthology Project

“describe a situation in which you feel that your judgement has been challenged...”



- Research partnership
- Writing seminars: < 100 narratives about challenging situations
- 11 in-dept interviews
- Download from www.csms.se

Military skill is about how to master...

Unstructured problem areas

Uncertain conditions

Difficult situations

Conflicting rules or goals



What do you need?

Be inventive

Take risks

Improvise

Be creative

Use your imagination



Major General:

You can compare it to a puzzle with hundreds of different pieces. Only when all the pieces have been put together you're able to say what it looks like.

Colonel:

None of this can be found in books. When a new situation arises that you have not previously met, you're able to act because you recognise situations you've been involved in before.

Quotes from Mission Commander – Swedish Experiences of Command
in the Expeditionary Era 2013

“The Swedish Armed Forces are an operational creature but also a bureaucratic machine. The rules are the foundation stone of the organisation. We call it: ‘A predetermined task at a price known in advance.’

“But that’s not how it works in reality.”

interview, unpublished

“I call it the tyranny of special interests. What is happening now is that the room for manoeuvre decreases with each new rule.”

“It's like a battle between different functions; economics, human relations, law. It's easy to lose the core of the profession.”

“It gets more and more difficult [...] there's a shadow world created, a kind of *parallel practice of unspoken ways of solving problems*.”

interview, unpublished



What's at stake?

Decoupling separating theory from practice, and words from action

Shadow practices (un)intentionally supporting dysfunctional work practices

Functional autism rules, instructions and systems

Deskilling – lost autonomy, skills erode



Thank you!

Questions, suggestions, criticism?

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Litterature

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You develop skills

by working in a practice,

by being confronted with real work-related challenges, by
being forced to handle them and

by reflecting systematically on them together with colleagues.

I would recommend anyone who recognizes themselves in the problem described here to ask these three simple questions:

Which situations at your place of work are difficult to assess?

What form of knowledge do you require in order to handle these situations?

And how do the rules, the methods, and the instructions address these situations?

A man in a cage...

