A Gender Perspective on Temporary Organisations in Crisis Management

Aida Alvinius , Edward Deverell & Susanne Hede

Published online: 21 Jul 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 80

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

A Gender Perspective on Temporary Organisations in Crisis Management

Aida Alvinius [ID][a], Edward Deverell[b] and Susanne Hede[a]

[a]Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership, Swedish Defence University, Karlstad and Stockholm, Sweden; [b]Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership, Swedish Defence University, Stockholm, Sweden

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine, explain and interpret concepts of gender in relation to information management, crisis communication and collaboration within the framework of (crisis) communicator tasks. Since the crisis management realm is male-coded and the communications profession is female-coded, there is reason to gain more knowledge of how these relate to each other. The ambition is to contribute to an underdeveloped area of theory. A total of nineteen participants joined the study. All the interviews were processed according to the guidelines for the thematic analysis method. Analysis showed that three themes are central to understanding the role of communicators in the crisis management system. These are a) crisis communication as a temporary organization; b) requirements imposed on, and expectations from, the role and the individual and c) organizational greed. Results are discussed theoretically from a gender perspective, and practical implications are given as well as proposals for further studies.

An introduction on crisis communicators in general

Risk, crisis preparedness and crisis management in our surroundings have been the subject of research and governmental investigations for many years, not least in the light of climate change and the deteriorating security policy situation (Swedish Government, 2017). Due to this uncertainty, there is increased need for well-functioning risk and crisis communication in both the private and the public sector (Olsson, 2014). The objective of risk and crisis communication is to enable the public and other crisis management actors to be prepared for the risks they may be exposed to in the future. The specific occupational group responsible for communication in general, and crisis communication in particular, consists of crisis communicators, communicators in emergency preparedness or information officers in cases where communicators are absent (Zerman, 1995).

Crisis communicators hold a specific responsibility for crisis management actors' communicative capacity in the event of crisis, situations of heightened alert and in regard to civil defence. This work also includes providing support, coordinating crisis communication and managing information campaigns, media narratives and disinformation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). One dilemma in crisis communication is that previous research (see, e.g. Krimsky, 2007) has been based on a linear model of communication with roles clearly defined for actors, media and public. The actors have been the sources for media that define news and forward messages to the passive public audience that may act on this media content (see

Jarlbro, 2004). However, with the introduction of the Internet, social media and increased transparency, the linear model of communication has become multidimensional in which all media exert considerable amounts of influence on what is included in the agenda (Karlsson, 2008), as do the general public (Thielen, Sivertun, Hyllengren, & Alvinius, 2019).

Another dilemma concerning government agency crisis communication is that it emphasizes sector-specific interests, brand strategies and visibility which shifts the focus from a wider activity to one that is more targeted (Byrkjeflot & Angell, 2007; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2013). The current, rapidly-changing media environment imposes high levels of demands for fast, accurate and coordinated government information. With increasingly fragmented and individually-adapted media use, where digital media give rise to more rapid and more unpredictable communications, examining how crisis communication works between government authorities and citizens has become an important democratic issue.

Empirical statements from crisis communicators or communicators in emergency preparedness indicate that their specific assignments may concern temporary organizations. As crises, even when diffused and protracted, are time-limited and fragmented, temporary organizations may facilitate the management of boundary-spanning dilemmas such as information deficiency, uncertainty about courses of events, demands from the public for relevant, up-to-date information, dilemmas concerning reaching out to different groups etc. Temporary organizations fill a purpose in crisis communication. Crisis management authorities need to show the outside world and themselves that they "cooperate" with external actors, but this must be accomplished in a structured and transparent manner, preferably outside of the ordinary organizational structure as crisis management situations are rarely similar from one situation to the next (Hede, 2018).

Temporary organizations can be defined based on the aspects that explain their existence (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). For example, temporary organizations may signal the feeling that the situation (for instance an accident) is urgent which is also the case when it comes to crisis communication. A temporary organization depends on one, or a very limited number of, defined tasks, temporary purposes and available resources, personnel and material. Another aspect that defines a temporary organization is its team, i.e. the bearers of attitudes, competencies, perceptions and not least gender, age and other background characteristics. The team is created around the task for a limited time period with an expectation of change. The temporary organization of, for example, crisis communication will be different at the outset of crisis management as compared to when it is concluded. This is decisive to the outcome. In summary, we conclude that crisis communication is a temporary form of organization, defined by four concepts; time, task, team and change (outcome) (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995).

Gender perspectives on crisis communication

Research has shown that there is a clear gender perspective with regard to crisis communication or collaboration between different crisis management actors in which crisis communication is included as a clearly defined element (Breakwell, 2014; Deverell, Alvinius, & Hede, 2019; Greenberg & Schneider, 1995; Gustafsod, 1998; Satterfield, Mertz, & Slovic, 2004; Wester-Herber, 2004). Aspects such as gender, age and experience, as well as various organizational preconditions, are important for how collaboration and crisis communication is managed in relation to various actors involved in the crisis management (Ericson, 2014). Studies have also found that crisis communication is characterized by masculinization and militarization of civilian work processes where social change and new security threats challenge the civil crisis management system with demands for introducing military structures—work processes that assign high value to masculine norms (Deverell et al., 2019).

Previous studies have shown that gender segregation occurs in the crisis management system, i.e. the initial phase in which emergency services and police enter the scene is characterized by male-

dominated organizational structures and norms (Ericson, 2011). Care functions, healthcare and institutions that enter the post-phase of crisis management are mostly female-dominated (Lindgren, 1999). Also so called non-legitimate crisis management players who traditionally have other duties, but may be used for crisis management are female-coded (Alvinius, 2019; Oscarsson & Danielsson, 2018). These may include teachers, social services, healthcare or medical care etc. Research therefore shows how a gender system—a systematic pattern of practices that construct different understandings of, and power relationships between, the genders (Connell, 1995)—is reflected in differences between the professions that are required to collaborate within crisis management (Ericson, 2014; Kanter, 1993).

Research on crisis communication has highlighted how information, as well as disinformation, is disseminated in the social landscape (Thielen et al., 2019), how it works purely technically (for example through social media) between authorities and the public, how the public responds to government information and how trust is affected in this context (Nilsson, Alvinius, & Enander, 2016; Olsson, 2014). Previous studies show how crisis communicators mainly focus on their profession's own concept of the task of crisis communication and its various uses (Fjeld & Molesworth, 2006; Heide & Simonsson, 2014; Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007). A gender perspective on crisis communicators as a profession, and their perceptions of gender does not, as far as we know, exist. In the case of gender and crisis communication, previous research shows that demographic aspects such as gender, age, background and ethnicity play a role in how crisis communication works and how risks are perceived (Breakwell, 2014; Olofsson, 2007). Breakwell (2014), moreover, found that gender does play a role. Furthermore, gender differences are found in most studies according to Breakwell (2014). Women are more likely to perceive risks and concerns than men who feel that they have been adequately informed about risks and threats (Breakwell, 2014). That this situation was generated by biological differences is rejected by several researchers (Jansson & Linghag, 2015; Wester-Herber, 2004). Instead, social structures in society support this difference. For example, it has been found that women are more frequently affected by disasters worldwide. A research review by Jansson and Linghag (2015) mentions a number of reasons; for example, women may be weaker swimmers than men and they care more for children and the elderly and thus end up with less mobility in society. Further, women more often wear uncomfortable clothes which makes it difficult to escape an incident. Moreover, other social burdens may affect women's resilience in disasters such as being single mothers, stigmatized, poor and living in vulnerable areas on the outskirts of society. Separately crisis communicators, crisis communication and gender are well researched, but as far as we are aware have not been united in a theory. This study helps to understand crisis communication from the point of view of crisis communicators, but is based on a gender perspective. We base our thinking on Moss Kanter's (1993) constructivist reasoning about the importance of gender and social relations in an organization. According to Kanter (1993), it is about the need to position oneself, become known to other organizational members, to gain recognition and resources. This differentiates men from women in an organization, but also between gender-coded professions that must interact with each other in a given situation (Ericson, 2014). There is a need to understand how the latter, that is feminine-coded crisis communicators, experience their profession and task through a gender perspective.

This theory integration in the article is carried out accordingly: Initially, crisis communication is presented as a temporary organization with gender-blind characteristics. Then the crisis communicators' own reflections on the heterogeneous public's perception of crisis communication are presented and finally various demands are placed on crisis communicators in the form of unpaid constant accessibility and mental preparedness. As crisis communicators are, for the most part, women the above brings consequences for the entire professional group. In addition, to our knowledge there are few studies on how temporary organizations, crisis communicators and crisis communication can be understood from a gender perspective. Sieben, Braun, and Ferreira (2016) found that traditional gender roles become clarified in

project organizations that are temporary and that gender-specific behaviour is expected by participants in these projects.

The *purpose* of this study is, consequently, to examine, explain and interpret ideas on gender-related aspects in relation to information management, crisis communication and collaboration within the framework of (crisis) communicator assignments. The aim is to study how the roles and missions of crisis communicators, as a form of temporary organization, are challenged by masculinization and militarization since earlier studies have shown that crisis management and communication methods originate from military organizations (Oscarsson & Danielsson, 2018). However, the communications profession is female-dominated (Statistics Sweden, 2017) and crisis management systems, of which crisis communications are part, are masculine and of military character (Oscarsson & Danielsson, 2018). In the light of the above, it becomes necessary to understand the interactions between these systems from a gender perspective.

Study context, crisis communicators and communicators within the crisis management

Crisis communication takes place during and after an event. It is intended to fulfil information needs held by the public, the media, collaborating actors or businesses and employees within the organization. The term event is used as a collective term for situations that deviate from what is considered normal and that require special communication efforts. The concept includes minor, everyday-related events as well as major social upheavals and extraordinary events. The focus and approach of crisis communication appears to be similar regardless of the type of event. Crisis communication aims are: a) to influence people's behaviour during the emergency crisis phase, b) to maintain stability in society and long-term confidence in actors with crisis responsibilities and in the crisis management system, c) for the actors and organizations responsible to define, formulate causal relationships and set the agenda in the media during the event, d) often post-crisis management and defending organizations and actors reputation in regard to their responsibility for the crisis to occur in the first place and for the crisis management and e) to legitimize the organizations and actors responsible who can then exploit the crisis and gain public confidence (Olsson, 2014; Olsson & Falkheimer, 2014).

Communicators in emergency preparedness and communicators who are responsible for crisis communication are brought in for events that require communicative efforts. This professional group is now found regularly at different levels in society and in both the private and the public sectors. Thirty-five years ago, 88 (out of 290 in total) Swedish municipalities employed at least one half-time information officer and 79 municipalities employed at least one full-time information officer. In another 175 municipalities, other professional groups were responsible for information and communication. Thus, professional information officers/communicators did not exist in 69% of the country's municipalities (Eriksson, 2014; Trondeman, 1985). Today, there are special communicators in most Swedish municipalities, although officials other than professional communicators are still often responsible for information/communication issues. However, working as a communicator usually involves a number of different tasks and roles of which crisis communication is one (Eriksson, 2014).

Communicators as a professional group appear to consist mostly of women. In 2014, 67% of women and 33% of men were registered as communicators according to Statistics Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2014). In 2017, which are the latest statistics available, there had been a slight increase in women to 68% (Statistics Sweden, 2017). We can assume that the profession of communicators is a gender-segregated professional group, especially at the local level, which tends to be female dominated in general. The statistical definition of gender segregation varies, but the most utilized method is the 40/60 model. This means that a professional group is gender segregated if men or women make up more than 60% (SOU, 2004). This is of the utmost importance for further study as the entire area of societal security and emergency preparedness can be described by the cause and

effect chain: threat-risk-crisis-crisis management-treatment-care with male domination in terms of risk and threat and female domination in terms of treatment and care (Mellström, 2010). Since the crisis communicators' tasks span throughout the crisis chain from risk and threats to the post-operations of the event, it is necessary to study this further.

Method

The methodological point of departure for the study

This interview study is mostly of inductive and exploratory character. It does, however, contain elements of deduction as attempts were made to identify evidence that crisis communication should be regarded as a form of temporary organization. The remaining analysis has been inductive. Since crisis communicators, crisis communication and gender are well-researched individually but not integrated, the ambition was to study them together to increase knowledge in a theoretically-underdeveloped area. The interviews collected for this study were analysed using open coding according to guidelines for thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). With no pre-assumptions, the data material was analysed in order to identify central themes on how communicators in emergency preparedness and communicators with experience of crisis communication feel, act and react in relation to communications efforts.

Selection of participants and municipalities in Sweden

The intention of the data collection was to obtain as wide a variety of described experiences as possible, which follows the guidelines for theory development from an empirical basis established by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Nineteen respondents were interviewed, of whom fourteen were women. Ten were communicators in emergency preparedness and nine were communicators with experience of crisis communications. Selection of respondents and participating municipalities took place through a selection of convenience and the participants to the study i.e. the communicators, were recruited by telephone or email contact with a selection of Swedish municipalities. The idea was to obtain broad representation from north to south, east to west, and to include municipalities of different sizes. A total of eleven municipalities were included in the study and they are presented in Table 1 based on size (i.e. number of inhabitants)

Table 1. Municipalities of different sizes included in the study.

Municipality	No. of inhabitants (data collected from websites of each municipality on 26 June 2019)	
1	Approx.	1 000 000
2	Approx.	150 000
3	Approx.	98 000
4	Approx.	94 000
5	Approx.	93 000
6	Approx.	60 000
7	Approx.	45 000
8	Approx.	27 000
9	Approx.	25 000
10	Approx.	20 000
11	Approx.	9 000

Data collection

The methodological approach was inductive according to thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The interviews followed an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions, followed up with individually-tailored questions such as "tell me more" or "in what way". The themes chosen were: 1) background factors; 2) Individual and organizational experiences of communication, crisis information and crisis management, 3) Collaboration with other actors, in-house and external and 4) Gender perspective on the communicator role.

The interviews were conducted between March and June 2019. They took place at the participants' workplaces, face-to-face or in some cases by telephone, due to geographical distance and the hectic work situation of the participants. The interviews lasted 40–90 minutes and were recorded and transcribed in full. Later in the research process they were analysed in accordance with the thematic analysis application (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The data collection and analysis were characterized by an iterative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After each interview, detailed theoretical notes (memos) were written in order to facilitate analysis. Through discussion with research colleagues, the data material was condensed and generated new concepts which were partially transferred to new interviews or which were written into the results section. This procedure contributed to both data saturation and an interrater reliability as the research group attempted to reach agreement in their analysis (Bryman, 2012). Notes have thus been sorted and compiled as the theoretical model emerged. Consequently, the theories and a theoretical model of themes that had emerged were formulated towards the end of the research and as a result of the analysis.

Data analysis and presentation

The first step in this analysis consisted of open coding which involves identifying meaning units in each individual interview. These could, for example, include special lines of thought, feelings or actions related to research questions. One example of a quote is given below:

> It is somehow in the nature of the profession. We are very loyal, and we answer the phone even in our time off although we get no pay for it. Well anyway I do, and have done in all my/communications/jobs.

This quote was coded as "*dutifulness*". Step two in the analysis consisted of evaluating and categorizing the codes according to similar content. From the above example, the code "*dutifulness*" was then sorted into the category "*demands and expectations concerning the role and the individual*" which was then sorted under the theme "*organisational greed*". The third and final step involved a comparison between categories and codes, generating three major themes a) *Crisis communication as a temporary organization*; b) *Demands and expectations concerning the role and the individual* and c) *Organizational greed*. These themes are presented in the Results section below, followed by the categories, codes and quotes.

Methodological and ethical research considerations

Methodologically, it should be mentioned that this study is qualitative in its design and follows the thematic analysis guidelines. The study relies on self-reported data only. This study has been carried out according to Swedish Research Council guidelines which consist of four requirements for how research is to be carried out; Information Requirement, Consent, Confidentiality Requirement and Use Requirement. In line with these guidelines, no quotes presented will be linked to specific municipality as this would make it easy to identify respondents.

Results

Results show that three themes are prominent when it comes to understanding the crisis communicator role, expectations and demands from a gender perspective: a) Crisis communication as a temporary organization; b) Demands and expectations concerning the role and the individual; and c) Organizational greed. These themes are presented below along with underlying categories and illustrative quotes.

Crisis communication as a temporary organization

The analysis of interviews shows that the role of communicators in crisis management, as well as their tasks, may be regarded as a form of temporary organization. The following identifies how crisis communicators attempt to position themselves in the crisis management context (see Kanter, 1993). This is about relationships with other actors in the group which determine the individual's ability to cooperate, be safe and influence his or her situation. Social relations can be used as a resource to raise status or secure a place in the group. This is achieved with varying degrees of success among crisis communicators who also work in temporary organizations. Crisis communication efforts are, just as the temporary organization, dependent on how quickly the message reaches out, the time limit of the assignment, the team composition, the nature of the task, the resources available and the outcome of inputs. This is entirely in line with the Lundin and Söderholm (1995) definition of temporary organization. The following quotes illustrate what a communicator experienced in connection with a serious flood in the municipality.

> They called while I was on my way to work, so I was already travelling when I was called by my director . . . we had a serious flood and we needed to hurry to the office to communicate. Then we established a crisis situation, so that BRT—our rescue service—was involved and the municipality./ . . . /I think it happened Thursday or Friday./ . . . /By Saturday-Sunday we were able to dismantle the crisis alert.

The creation of a temporary organization had been unproblematic in the previous quote, but several other crisis communicators testify to other situations. Time-critical circumstances sometimes contributed to short-circuits in the organization so that crisis communicators were not initially involved and their role was degraded. Then they had to convey messages that they themselves had not formulated:

> Yes, firstly you have to be there from the beginning. We have had some minor crises here in recent years, when they came to me and said "Here's a press release." . . . then I said "what's this?" And then I find out that there has been the beginning of some kind of crisis and I have not even been called in although it is stated in the regulations that the communicator must participate in this group!

One interviewee reflected on the fact that the communication profession is female dominated but crisis communication is "owned" by men. Here is what she says in her statement:

> The men who work in the communications industry are often connected to the Internet, possibly social media as well. But very much the online part of it. I guess this is a reflection I have made. So it is a bit like all municipal activities . . . or very much of the public sector is fairly women-dominated./ . . . /Otherwise, I think that crisis communication might be an aspect where I might see more men than I do in other types of communications contexts.

Communication in crisis contributes to the decision-making that crisis management actors must carry out. In addition, crisis communication contributes to the design of a functional situation picture and vocation-specific situation awareness that works to assist all the collaborators (Danielsson, Alvinius, & Larsson, 2014). Channels of communication are vital in this context to contribute to decision-making and communication to the public and other actors. Historically, information has been paper-based, but today social media is the quickest way to reach out and it is geographically unlimited. The whole world can receive the same information at the same time. A participant describes the role of social media:

> And then as our first-choice channel … we took our website. After all, this was five years ago. It has changed now, today it would have certainly been Facebook as our first channel. But then we had more followers and more interest on the website.

Communication is carried out internally, to decision makers and also to the public, which means that crisis communicators are a kind of information hub or boundary spanner, working across borders (Williams, 2013). Parallel with online communications, activities are also coordinated at permanent as well as temporary sites depending on whether the municipality has sufficient resources for a permanent or a temporary solution. Small municipalities do not have as many extraordinary events which may make it easier for those who are on call to communicate with the public from home. There is no fixed location, place is established as and when necessary:

> In the spring there can be a lot of water leaks. For the communicators it is handy that they can call people at home and someone does the communicating from there.

The temporary organization is task-oriented, and none of the participants initially reflected on a gender perspective. Gender blindness in the crisis management system is not a new phenomenon. The fact that male-encoded tasks are prioritized to a greater extent when resources are allocated has been known for decades (see Amundsdotter, Ericson, Jansson, & Linghag, 2015; Ericson, 2017). In the temporary organization, gender blindness appears to be strengthened as time-critical conditions prevail and focus on the task is primary. This may also apply to the ability to reach out with their message and how easily it is received by recipients. From a gender perspective, the participants have therefore reflected on the following aspects; how men, in the role of crisis communicator, seem to have an easier time of getting others to listen. Age also plays a part as well as experience of having worked or belonged to another organization, in this case a military organization. Since crisis communication and crisis coordination are strongly influenced by masculine and military norms, it can be understood that the task is perceived as more favourable for the male communicators (see also Sieben et al., 2016). The following quotes illustrate gender differences:

> And it is clear that then you have to manage the break in the situation—how do you value the event—as a man or woman? It is very difficult to assess. But I can see that the men are more about wanting to solve the problem, especially those who are practitioners. This is secondary to communicating how to solve it and when it has been solved. Now it is so that I am getting on in years and maybe have a little presence and I am a man. So I experience that it is a little easier to get my message out. Not that I get heavy with it, it is just a little easier for me … I think.

Demands and expectations concerning the role and the individual

For crisis communicators, the major part of the task is to act as an information hub, to deal with any communicative mistake that may occur and, to some extent, neutralize information so it is correctly perceived by the public. A similar study of this type of phenomenon has been seen in military contexts where boundary spanners have an important role which is to equalize and neutralize information (Alvinius, 2012). In military contexts, incorrect information may risk lives. In this study, the task is more about clearing up misunderstandings between participants, or creating awareness of the spreading of rumours that need to be neutralized, even if this may be difficult. These quotes illustrate the above:

> It's clear that sometimes you do not feel the same as them and that we may have our own opinions on, for example, police communications. But correcting them is not difficult, you just say "I see, you based it on this, but this could be interpreted like this which will cause problems for us." They say "Well. We hadn't thought about that." and then we change it.

Another challenge for crisis communicators is about reaching out to all possible relevant groups in society. The diversity perspective must be taken into account so that no group ends up outside the loop. Target groups that have been mentioned as having to be included at some point are tourists,

children, the elderly who cannot get information digitally, and immigrant groups who cannot speak the language. In some cases, an extraordinary event could lead to national and international journalists becoming a target group for information. We illustrate:

> In these major incidents we have had, there have been many more target groups really, because then we get the entire journalist group round our necks. Sometimes foreign journalists too.

> But what happened after the crisis was that the structure of society is … the population is that much older/ … /Later we have received criticism for not having distributed the information properly—simply because that generation is not connected via mobile communication in the same way as the younger ones.

A challenge that the interview material testifies to is managing asymmetrical relationships with the emergency services and other crisis management actors:

> If we look at the fire again, I think that we have gained a much greater understanding of the communicators' role after that. I am not sure that I would have answered the same a few years ago if you had interviewed me. Then I probably would have thought it was a bigger challenge to make people listen to what the communicators think is important.

Crisis communicators also generally have to handle parallel time scales where both short-term and long-term communicative efforts are to be considered. In addition, a number of the interviewees reported parallel events where they had to deal with not only the main event but also situations that arose parallel or as consequences. One final challenge was to balance structure and freedom, i.e. to manage the need for templates and structures on the one hand, and improvisation on the other. Two quotes highlight this in more detail:

> The year before we also had an irrigation … a hosepipe ban, but not for the same reason and quite briefly. It was just for the summer months. This was from April to the autumn … it was October. So it was a long-term watering ban. And the second message that was about changing our behaviour as to how we manage our drinking water, so it was more long-term. This kind of thing is still ongoing. So there were two parallel messages that we had to manage there.

> Then I also feel that we tend to have an exaggerated belief in templates for different situations which, as a communicator, you become a little sceptical about./ … /You have to judge each situation based on what has actually happened and not just stare at a template.

Organizational greed

Social change such as globalization and social acceleration (Rosa, 2013) affect all organizations and all occupational groups. Organizational theorists talk about organizational stress. This picture includes far-reaching demands for the accessibility and loyalty of the members of the organization. Coser (1974) calls it "institutional greed" which means that the organization demands more from the individual than it offers. For crisis communicators, there is the constant presence of social media, a news flow that never stops updating and a mailbox that is open 24 hours a day, an expression of institutional greed. Communicators testify to an expectation of being constantly available, during all their free time, evenings, weekends and holidays. According to the Swedish Communicator Association (2019) over 70% of European communicators think that their workload has become heavier, and roughly the same proportion believe that they work too much to maintain a good work-life balance. At the same time, two out of five say they do not know how to manage the increased flow of information. This informal expectation of being constantly available is illustrated in the quotes below:

> There are many communicators without payment who are woken up in the middle of the night. And because you think it is important and you want to do a good job and you understand that it matters that communication is initiated, you do it anyway.

Formal requirements, as well as some other informal expectations, are about the nature of the task, being faced with an extraordinary event and acting on it. In the next quote, a respondent testifies to formal as well as informal demands:

> A little informal demand is that we say that we should be familiar with local activities, we should be able to use the technical tools we have available. And there is … or the performance of the task itself has requirements, yes. I will be available and able to start work immediately, and I will be able to report to town hall, on paper it is stated within two hours. In practice, we have said one hour. And I must be sober. But there are no formal training requirements for example. Nothing like that.

The organizational greed that imposes demands on crisis communicator accessibility has "hit" all the participants to some extent. However, one respondent reflects on whether there is a gender difference which means female crisis communicators are more available in their role than their male colleagues, in addition without being paid any extra salary:

> To generalise quite broadly, I might think that dutiful women are the ones who still answer the phone though it is Saturday and though they are not on duty. They become a CwP, a communicator without payment. As compared to more obdurate men who say "No, I am not paid for that. I won't answer the phone".

Another demand or expectation may be of an emotional nature. It is not just about being available when the organization needs you, it is also about a constant, long-lasting feeling of always having to be in readiness, having to keep track of the situation, staying updated on what is happening in the outside world (compare Hochschild, 1983/2003). Never ever being able to relax seems to affect one's health and create stress. One participant states:

> This physical feeling that you should always be available if putting out information is required etc. can create stress from the working environment viewpoint/ … /

The demand for accessibility and the tasks concerned may sometimes appear difficult to reconcile with family life. One respondent reflected on this that it must be feasible to say whether an assignment is possible or not due to family reasons. However, they have not experienced this problem themselves:

> I guess you could say that "this is not possible due to my family situation. Now I have two young children at home" or yes, like … it is a question that has not been relevant to me yet. But it is clear that an employee … if you are strategic, but have some good reason for not … no, but it is clear that you have to be able to do it. But then there is an agreement between the employee and our unit manager.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine, explain and interpret ideas about gender-related aspects in relation to information management, crisis communication and collaboration within the framework of (crisis) communicator tasks. Since the crisis management system is male-coded (Mellström, 2010) and the communication profession is female-coded, there is reason to expand our knowledge of how these relate to each other. The rationale behind this study is the assumption that gender shapes legitimacy within different professions and organizations (Ericson, 2014; Kanter, 1993) which seems to be important for crisis communicator working conditions. Another vital element is the assumption that social relationships are gender-marked and hierarchical (Kanter, 1993) which may explain how the status of crisis communicators is preconditioned in the crisis management context. The analysis shows that three themes appear to be central to understanding the role of communicators in the crisis management system. These themes are: a) crisis communication as a temporary organization; b) demands and expectations concerning the role and the individual; and c) organizational greed. In this discussion, each one of these will be discussed from a gender perspective.

The theoretical contribution concerns understanding the female-coded profession of communicators in general, and crisis communicators in particular (Eriksson, 2014; Statistics Sweden, 2017) who, under extraordinary circumstances, will meet the male and military-coded crisis management system consisting of male-dominant occupational groups (Ericson, 2011, 2014). The crisis-communication efforts that the participants testified to can be understood as a temporary organization. In time-critical conditions, gender roles tend to return to more traditional states where gender blindness prevails (Alvinius, 2019; Amundsdotter et al., 2015). According to the informants in this study, crisis communication appears to be managed more successfully by men as they appear to possess more experience of military organization, are older, more experienced and benefit from their gender while several women felt that it was more difficult to reach out with their message and sometimes they were not even included in crisis management when it was necessary, nor were they listened to. The fact that the crisis management system is structured in this manner can be deduced from previous research that regards crisis management as a central arena where men tend to be regarded as guarantors of social development, livelihood and, not least, defenders of modern societal living conditions (Connell, 1995; Whitehead, 2002).

Demands and expectations concerning the role and the individual were about neutralizing information to the public, balancing between the police and the rescue services on the one hand and the public on the other. According to previous research (Ericson, 2014; Ericson & Mellström, 2016) central professions and social institutions such as the police, emergency services and civil (and/or military) defence are highlighted as important arenas where male norms are re-created and have preference as concerns interpretation in crisis situations. This imposes high levels of demands on communicators to marry these views with the public's need for information. For this reason, communicators in this study must be able to neutralize information as well as manage asymmetrical relationships with emergency services and the police. The communicators themselves must consider diversity perspectives, including gender, when approaching the public in order to be able to disseminate information that is as comprehensive as possible. They contribute to confidence-building in crisis management because they act as hubs in the network between the public and the authorities, (Williams, 2013). In the event of a crisis, demands for action are imposed on authorities, otherwise there is a risk of losing legitimacy and public trust (Jansson & Linghag, 2015). Consequently, the crisis communicators' role is vital to crisis management, and despite the fact that the professional group is female-coded, it needs legitimacy and credibility in its continued work within crisis information.

Organizational greed refers to the organization's demands for accessibility (Coser, 1974) which is also confirmed in this study of crisis communicators. A number of participants reflected on gender differences and noted that women are more "accessible" than men (even without receiving extra pay) and the stress of having to maintain the emergency preparedness mode, which is in line with Hochschild's theory of emotional work pay (1983/2003). In this case, it is not about changing their feelings in the Hochschild's (1983/2003) meaning but rather about the organization's demands on the individual to be constantly on guard, keeping track of the outside world and, if necessary, arriving at work within the space of an hour. This is a new form of emotional work that can be understood in relation to the organization's greed. Together, they contribute to the stress the respondents reported in this study.

Conclusions

The primary conclusion is that the work of crisis communicators, on the basis of this study's results, may be made more difficult due to higher demands. In Kanter's opinion, the temporary organization the task is placed in generates higher levels of demands on those who are not "known" in the organization and have been positioned earlier (1993). The risk is that crisis communication does not work and that the crisis communication task is not taken seriously. Another conclusion is that crisis communicators must themselves observe intersectional perspectives in the crisis communication that will be issued to the

public while being given the responsibility of neutralizing asymmetrical information paths between different collaborators. Responsibility seems to lie with the crisis communicators as some collaborators believe they have an interpretative preference (Deverell et al., 2019). The final challenge of organizational greed tends to reinforce these invisible, high-level demands for constant availability and mental preparedness, which affect both individual freedom and work-life balance.

Finally, we can say that communicators and crisis communicators are part of the crisis management system, even though this professional group is modern and newly-established. It is challenged by rapid changes in society and the entry of social media (Olsson, 2014). For this reason, this professional group needs recognition and higher status in order to contribute optimally to well-functioning societal crisis management. Particularly when the government demands that all social groups, legitimate or non-legitimate, civilian or uniformed, be able to contribute to society's total defence.

Research issues concerning crisis management in other female-dominated professions need to be explored qualitatively and quantitatively. The practical implications of this study may be suitable for use in developing competencies of professional crisis communicators and duty officers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Aida Alvinius (PhD, Karlstad University, Sweden) is Associate Professor in Leadership Under Demanding Conditions and university lecturer at the Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership at the Swedish Defence University. She has published numerous articles within the fields of organization, leadership, gender, crisis management and military sociology.

Edward Deverell (PhD, Utrecht University, Netherlands) is a university lecturer at the Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership at the Swedish Defence University. He has published articles and chapters in books within the field of public administration, gender studies, organization and crisis management.

Susanne Hede (PhD, Karlstad University, Sweden) is a university lecturer focusing on leadership under demanding conditions from a psychological perspective. She teaches and researches at the Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership at the Swedish Defence University. She has published articles and research reports within the fields of leadership and crisis management.

ORCID

Aida Alvinius 🔴 http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5070-4979

References

Alvinius, A. (2012). The inadequacy of bureaucratic organisations: Organisational adaptation through boundary spanning in a civil-military context. *Res Militaris*, 3(1), 1–23.

Alvinius, A. (2019). A gender perspective on teachers as crisis managers. *NORA-Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 27(2), 125–138.

Amundsdotter, E., Ericson, M., Jansson, U., & Linghag, S. (2015). *Motstånd och strategier i jämstalldhetsarbete* [Resistance and strategies in gender equality activities]. Karlstad: Karlstad University Press.

Breakwell, G. M. (2014). *The Psychology of Risk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Byrkjeflot, H., & Angell, S. (2007). Dressing up hospitals as enterprises? The expansion and managerialisation of communication in Norwegian hospitals. In I. P. Kjær & T. Slaatta (Eds.), *The media-embedded firm* (pp. 81–113). Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business Press.

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120–123.

Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *16*(2), 165–186.

Coser, L. A. (1974). *Greedy institutions: Patterns of undivided commitment*. New York: Free Press.

Danielsson, E., Alvinius, A., & Larsson, G. (2014). From common operating picture to situational awareness. *International Journal of Emergency Management*, *10*(1), 28–47.

Deverell, E., Alvinius, A., & Hede, S. (2019). Horizontal collaboration in crisis management: An experimental study of the duty officer function in three public agencies. *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy*, *10*(4), 484–508.

Ericson, M. (2011). *Nära inpå: Maskulinitet, intimitet och gemenskap i brandmäns arbetslag* [Close: Masculinity, intimacy and community in firefighter work teams]. (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg.

Ericson, M. (2014). Firefighters as exceptional: Heroism, nationalism and masculinity in times of suburban riots and anti-racist protests. *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies*, *9*(3), 178–190.

Ericson, M. (2017). Krisberedskapspusslet: Meningsskapande och strategier i arbetet med risk-and sårbarhetsanalyser [The puzzle of crisis preparedness - sense-making strategies when analysing societal risk and vulnerability]. *Arbetsmarknad & Arbetsliv*, *23*(4), 62–78.

Ericson, M., & Mellström, U. (2016). *Masculinities, gender equality and crisis management*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Eriksson, M. (2014). *Kommunala kommunikatorers beredskap för kriskommunikation via sociala medier* [Municipal communicators' preparedness for crisis communication via social media]. Sundsvall: DEMICOM, Mittuniversitetet.

Fjeld, K., & Molesworth, M. (2006). PR practitioners' experiences of, and attitudes towards, the internet's contribution to external crisis communication. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *11*(4), 391–405.

Fredriksson, M., & Pallas, J. (2013). *Med synlighet som ledstjärna: En analys av vilka principer som styr kommunikationsarbetet i nationella forvaltningsmyndigheter* [Using visibility as a guiding principle: an analysis of the principles that govern communication activities in national administrative agencies]. Uppsala: Uppsala Universty.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Greenberg, M. R., & Schneider, D. F. (1995). Gender differences in risk perception: Effects differ in stressed vs. non-stressed environments. *Risk Analysis*, *15*(4), 503–511.

Gustafsod, P. E. (1998). Gender differences in risk perception: Theoretical and methodological erspectives. *Risk Analysis*, *18*(6), 805–811.

Hede, S. (2018). *Crisis management: Psychological challenges for leaders* (Doctoral dissertation). Karlstad University Press, Karlstad.

Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2014). Developing internal crisis communication: New roles and practices of communication professionals. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *19*(2), 128–146.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983/2003). *The managed heart: Commercialisation of human feelings*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Jansson, U., & Linghag, S. (2015). *Genderperspektiv på ledning och samverkan vid olyckor och kriser – En forskningsöversikt* [A gender perspective on leadership and collaboration in crisis management – a research overview]. Karlstad: Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency.

Jarlbro, G. (2004). *Krisjournalistik eller journalistik i kris?* [Crisis journalism or journalism in crisis?]. Stockholm: KBM.

Kanter, R. M. (1993). *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: BasicBooks.

Karlsson, M. (2008). *Kriskommunikation i förändring: Internet, den ökade publiceringshastigheten och de förändrade villkoren for kriskommunikation* [Crisis communication in the process of change: Internet, increased publishing speed and changing preconditions for crisis communication]. Stockholm: Demokratiinstitutet.

Krimsky, S. (2007). Risk communication in the internet age: The rise of disorganised skepticism. *Environmental Hazards*, *7*(2), 157–164.

Lindgren, G. (1999). *Klass, kön och kirurgi: Relationer bland vårdpersonal i organisationsförändringarnas spår* [Class, gender and surgery: relationships among care personnel in the wake of organisational change]. Malmö: Liber.

Lundin, R. A., & Söderholm, A. (1995). A theory of the temporary organisation. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *11*(4), 437–455.

Mellström, U. (2010). *Gendervetenskapliga perspektiv på MSBs verksamhetsområden* [Gender perspective on MSB operational areas]. Stockholm: Myndigheten for samhällsskydd och beredskap.

Nilsson, S., Alvinius, A., & Enander, A. (2016). Frames of public reactions in crisis. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, *24*(1), 14–26.

Olofsson, A. (2007). Kriskommunikation i ett heterogent samhälle—lika för alla eller till var och en efter behov?/ Crisis communication in a heterogeneous society—Equal for all or to each and everyone as required? *Sociologisk Forskning*, *44*(3), 6–29.

Olsson, E. K. (2014). Crisis communication in public organisations: Dimensions of crisis communication revisited. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, *22*(2), 113–125.

Olsson, E. K., & Falkheimer, J. (2014). *Gränsöverskridande kriskommunikation: En studie av politiska aktörers, offentliga organisationers och nyhetsmediers kommunikation under samhällskriser* [Boundary-spanning communications: a study of communication from political actors, public organisations and news media during social crises]. Stockholm: Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och Beredskap.

Oscarsson, O., & Danielsson, E. (2018). Unrecognised crisis management-Normalising everyday work: The work practice of crisis management in a refugee situation. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 26(2), 225–236.

Rosa, H. (2013). *Social acceleration: A new theory of modernity*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.

Satterfield, T. A., Mertz, C. K., & Slovic, P. (2004). Discrimination, vulnerability, and justice in the face of risk. *Risk Analysis: An International Journal*, 24(1), 115–129.

Sieben, B., Braun, T., & Ferreira, A. I. (2016). Reproduction of 'Typical'gender roles in temporary organisations—No surprise for whom? The case of cooperative behaviors and their acknowledgement. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 32(1), 52–62.

SOU. (2004). *Den könsuppdelade arbetsmarknaden. Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2004: 43* [The gender-segregated labour market. Official studies 2004:43]. Stockholm: Swedish Government.

Statistics Sweden. (2014). *The Swedish occupational register with statistics 2014*. Stockholm: Statistiska Centralbyrån. Retrieved from http://share.scb.se/ov9993/data/publikationer/statistik/am/am0208/2014a01/am0208_2014a01_sm_am33sm1601.pdf

Statistics Sweden. (2017). *The Swedish occupational register with statistics 2017*. Stockholm: Statistiska Centralbyrån. Retrieved from https://www.scb.se/contentassets/1fe7f957920f4eaf97bddcc0270553f2/am0208_2017a01_sm_am33sm1901.pdf

Swedish Communicator Association. (2019). Retrieved from https://sverigeskommunikatoren.se/kunskap/nyheter/kommunikatoren–allid-accessible-death-disposed/

Swedish Government. (2017). *National security strategy*. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

Thielen, A., Sivertun, Å., Hyllengren, P., & Alvinius, A. (2019). Frames of the terrorist attack in Sweden: A qualitative study of true and fake news coverage. *International Journal of Emergency Management*, 15(3), 205–220.

Trondeman, M. (1985). *Informationsbäckenet . . . om den professionaliserade kommunala informationens geografiska snedfordelning i Sverige* [The information basin . . . on the geographical slanting of professionalised municipal information in Sweden]. Växjö: Högskolan i Växjö.

Ulmer, R. R., Seeger, M. W., & Sellnow, T. L. (2007). Post-crisis communication and renewal: Expanding the parameters of post-crisis discourse. *Public Relations Review*, 33(2), 130–134.

Wester-Herber, M. (2004). *Talking to me?: Risk communication to a diverse public* (Doctoral dissertation). Örebro universitetsbibliotek.

Whitehead, S. (2002). *Men and masculinities. Key themes and new directions*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Williams, P. (2013). We are all boundary spanners now? *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 26(1), 17–32.

Zerman, D. (1995). Crisis communication: Managing the mass media. *Information Management & Computer Security*, 3(5), 25–28.