

An Embedded Insider Perspective on Qualitative Research in Military Organizations

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Writing in progress – please do not quote

Introduction

The German General and one of the greatest military strategists von Moltke's² famous principle – 'No battle plan survives contact with the enemy' – encompasses the core element of military leadership, tactics and planning, and its relationship to leading in high-risk contexts. Plans are important, but sound and effective leadership in high-risk situations are imperative for the success of any operations (Trewin, Ojiako, & Johnson, 2010).

The existing research into military high-risk teams is limited, and several researchers indicate that the area should be further developed (Anaki, Brezniak, & Shalom, 2012; Bangari, 2014; Baran & Scott, 2010; Beyer, 2010; Börjesson, Österberg, & Enander, 2011; D. J. Campbell, Hannah, & Matthews, 2010; Fisher, Hutchings, & Sarros, 2010; Hannah, Campbell, & Matthews, 2010; Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, & Cavarretta, 2009; Ramthun, 2013; Yammarino, Mumford, Connelly, & Dionne, 2010) both at micro, meso and macro levels (D. J. Campbell et al., 2010, p. 161). It is a problem that we have so little knowledge of which actions and processes that characterize and contribute to leadership in dangerous, equivocal and time-sensitive operations. Much of what has been written about high-risk leadership, Campbell et al. (2010: 158) argue, take the form of anecdotes, memoirs, historical reports, retrospective questionnaire surveys or research conducted in simulated or almost risky contexts, indicating a lack of empirical research.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the methodology in a study with the following working research question: how does Danish military high-risk teams practice leadership, and what makes it possible? The research is in-progress and the paper will describe and argue for the use of qualitative in-situ methods and thereby fill out the gap of in-situ situated research in small military teams operating under high-risk and high pressure. If we want to understand in situ practices, the research has to take place in situ.

The first section about leadership will address how leadership can be understood as a phenomenon and how the understanding of leadership has evolved from being i.e. 'heroic' to a more contextualized and socially constructed phenomenon, where leadership is not inherent a certain individual. The special circumstances of military leadership and its relation to contextual high-risk danger in an environment characterized of instability, chaos, uncertainty and destruction (Sookermany, Sand, & Breivik, 2015) is then discussed, the term risk is elaborated, and examples of high-risk contexts are described. The section will set the foundation

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2 Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke (26 October 1800–24 April 1891) was chief of staff of the Prussian Army. He was one of the first military commanders to highlight the need to break up large armies into smaller and more manageable units that had control over their own supply chain and movement (Trewin, Ojiako, & Johnson, 2010).

for my reflections about researching leadership in a military context. The next main section about methodology and data collection will try to explain how I conduct my in-situ work-in-progress research in Danish military high-risk teams in Afghanistan. The usability of my method in a military context as well as the advantages, values and possibilities of the method are discussed. My reflections from the field e.g. the risk of going too native in the field is described by a couple of examples, and in connection with that, the limitations of insider research is addressed. The last section will offer some concluding remarks and I will very briefly address some possible theoretical contributions and the future research of the project is described.

Leadership

This section will address how leadership can be understood as a phenomenon and how the understanding of leadership has evolved from being i.e. 'heroic' to a more contextualized and socially constructed phenomenon, where leadership is not inherent a certain individual.

Leadership is one of the most studied constructs in all of the social sciences (Storey, 2017). But what is Leadership? According to Hunt (2004) the answer depends on the ontological (the nature or essence of phenomenon being studied) and epistemological (how one goes about understanding the phenomenon and communicating such knowledge to others) assumptions one makes about the definition and purpose of leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In this perspective, the question in essence seems to be whether a leader himself may choose his approach toward the leading space with its actors or whether this imposes and influences upon him (Heldal & Antonsen, 2014). Leadership is a mature field, and can be traced back as far as ancient Egypt and China (Hunt & Dodge, 2000). Leadership studies has often been described as a field of divergent frameworks in search of a unifying perspective but there seem to be no unifying definition or theory of leadership (Ziegler & DeGrosky, 2008). One reason for this is that each research is placed in a different context and analysed from a unique set of perspectives and outcomes. Also, since most leadership research is US centric or directed, this naturally raises questions about its universal applicability across diverse cultures, stages of development, and contexts (Bangari, 2014). Ziegler & DeGrosky (2008) indicate that if there is any agreement about leadership studies today, it is that a new leadership paradigm is emerging. A paradigm shifting the field from an 'industrial' model of leadership to a 'post-industrial' model of leadership. An industrial model where the individual (i.e. leader) was in focus and leadership was based on position power, and historically conceptualized as behaviors done to or for others – a leadership concept that attributes leadership to individuals creating heroic definitions of leadership. In the post-industrial model, leadership is more seen as a relational process and based on shared power, and nowadays leadership is increasingly conceptualized as collective or collaborative processes. This moves away from a heroic view (hence the oft-used label 'postheroic leadership') because leadership is always collectively enacted in a situation, and it therefore becomes a consequence of the actors' relations, an effect processually generated by a group of people, a product of their local interactions (Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012). Here leadership is not seen as a property of individuals and their behaviors, but as a collective phenomenon that is distributed or shared among different people, potentially fluid, and constructed in interaction (Denis et al., 2012). It is thus appropriate to focus on the leadership interaction (Rost, 1993) where the skills of inquiry, curiosity and the importance of creating a climate for collaboration and shared decision making rather than command and control, are imperative elements (Ziegler & DeGrosky, 2008). Leadership is significantly affected by the way followers construct their understanding of the formal leader in terms of their interpretation of his or her personality, behaviors, and effectiveness. (Shamir, 2007) suggested that leadership effectiveness is just as much a product of good followers as it is of good leaders (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). When examining leadership it can be helpful to focus on the 'practices aspect', where leadership is seen to emerge

in interactions between people. Here it is essential to go beyond a consideration of the roles, strategies, and traits of the individuals who occupy formal leadership positions to investigate how the practice of leadership is stretched over leaders, followers, and the material and symbolic artifacts in the situation (Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012). Leadership can fundamentally be seen more about participation and collectively creating a sense of direction than it is about control and exercising authority. This assumption problematizes the individuality of leadership, which in turn requires a reconceptualization of what leadership is and, for some, what indeed it should be. It can be conceptualized as a social phenomenon, as a collective process in which formally designated individuals may play a role, but from which it is impossible to ignore other actors. The place of individuals is thus not eliminated but reduced: actors are present in leadership—enacting it, influencing it, and co-creating it—but they are not ‘containers’ of leadership (Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012, p. 254). As described in the Danish Defence Leadership Framework (FKODIR 121-5, 2008), leadership is not the privilege of formal appointed leaders, but everybody acting in the leading space are part of the leadership process (the author’s translation):

‘Good leadership is, in collaboration with other relevant actors, to create conditions that promotes good and efficient task solving with a view to reaching current and future goals... Leadership is thus a mutual influence process in which there are leaders, employees and other relevant actors... Though the leader has the formal managerial responsibility, it is up to everyone to do their best for themselves to promote good leadership. In order for everyone to do that, the leader must give freedom for others to take initiative and assume independent responsibility in and around the task solution.... Often focus is on the formal leader, but leadership is exercised by anyone who is in able to influence a group, formally as informally, in other words of all who contribute to task solution. Leadership is thus a relationship between both internal and external contributors.’

As described above the term leadership has many meanings and understandings, and it is carried out by a variety of different people, for which reason it becomes harder and harder to distinguish what is definable as ‘leadership’ and what might be seen as an ordinary element of e.g. ‘teamwork’, ‘decision-making’ or ‘communication’ (Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012). As social action is the product of a dialectical relationship between humans and their world, practice as a social construct is located within the collective rather than the individual realm. Practices are the outcome of collective sensemaking and bringing a practice approach to the study of leadership allows researchers to analyze the work of leadership as a collective achievement, breaking it down into smaller parts (Ospina & Foldy, 2010). Recognizing that it is simply impossible in a traditional sense to ‘measure’ something like leadership in a meaningful way, one can as well set qualitatively and contextually to work in a humble understanding that the laws and truths that would be nice to nail firmly, are not found.

Military Leadership

This paragraph will briefly address the special circumstances of military leadership and its relation to contextual high-risk danger in an environment characterized of instability, chaos, uncertainty and destruction.

In the light of the discussion of the term leadership above, an interesting question is if one can talk about military leadership as such or if it is more pertinent to talk about leadership in a military context. As Sookermany, Sand, & Breivik (2015) describe it, a significant and, to some extent, defining feature of military performance, and leadership for that sake, is its relation to contextual danger in an environment characterized of instability, chaos, uncertainty and destruction. When one think of military conduct in its

purest sense, as an instrument of organized political violence (Weber, 1946), it is no cliché to say that it is related to danger in an existential way – soldiers ultimately put their own or others' lives at stake executing military skills in pursuit of political goals (Sookermany, Sand, & Breivik, 2015). Leading at the knife's edge, so to say, of necessity requires combined efforts of the whole team to succeed. Successful military operational teams realize that the 'good old ways' of yore, when officers and leaders commanded and controlled and the soldiers simply obeyed, without any questions, are simply not warranted in today's modern societies. The directive style of (military) leadership is possibly not justifiable anymore in today's context, with levels of competence and awareness rising, and an increased expectation from private soldiers to be involved in the emerging context. Therefore, today's military leaders are equally dependent upon their subordinates to come up with their explicit suggestions and perspectives, as much as they expect them to take on-the-spot decisions as 'strategic corporals' (Tripodi & Wolfendale, 2012), while operating on their own, often times out of communication, and when confronted with contingencies not planned for (Bangari, 2014). They know that the road to being successful in a dangerous environment calls for perseverance, alertness to what is going on around them, asking questions, and finding answers to them; what (Weick, 2001) suggests as 'mindfulness,' 'sensemaking' and 'experimentation'. Soldiers operating in these environments over extended periods and confronted with the necessity for continuing innovation and change, to stay at the top being alert and ready, need to be constantly motivated, e.g. by being invited into active participation (Bangari, 2014). Taken my reflections on how leadership can be perceived discussed above, and my approach to methodology described below, my working research question at present is as follows: how does Danish military high-risk teams practice leadership, and what makes it possible?

Leadership in a Military High-Risk Context

This paragraph will discuss and describe the term risk, and examples of high-risk contexts will be described.

The meaning of the word 'risk' has changed over the centuries and is today used in different contexts with a variety of content (Sookermany et al., 2015). The Oxford English Dictionary defines risk in terms of both danger and the possibility that something unpleasant will occur. The word in fact derives 'from the early Italian *risicare* which means "to dare"' (Knighton, 2004, p. 311). It is a term that is widely and frequently used, but it seems clear that there is a lack of common understanding of the term. Often there is a sense among people that risk involves costs and benefits, and people typically name words like probability, possibility or uncertainty as an element of risk. In a classical mathematical explanation, risk quantifies the likelihood that a known outcome will not occur. Thus, outcomes with the same probability of occurrence carry the same risk (Knighton, 2004).

Risk is a part of everything that happens in life; it is constant and encountered every day by all people. It is at the same time both a subjective and an objective abstraction (S. Campbell, 2006; Hansson, 2005), associated with varying meanings which contributes to its ambiguity (Trewin et al., 2010; Ward & Chapman, 2003). Johnson (2007) highlights the fact that certain approaches to operational effectiveness within the military depend largely on the adoption of certain techniques and approaches which are likely to be regarded as unethical within a civilian context (Trewin et al., 2010). An example of this could be the killing of innocent people due to collateral damage in order to achieve a specific military target. Leadership in high-risk contexts must take the roles of intuition (Kaempf, Klein, Thordsen, & Wolf, 1996), training (Yardley & Kakabadse, 2007) and experience (Quíñones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995) into consideration when planning and conducting operations (Trewin et al., 2010).

Risk is predominantly interpreted as something negative involving emotional behaviors as e.g. anxiety, fear, stress and concern, and should be avoided (Yates, 1992). But risk can also have a positive potential as

uncertainty gives us the option of alternative actions (Adams, 1995; Bernstein, 2012). Such a perception of risk suggests a different set of emotional qualities or behaviors connected to the concept of risk, for example courage, robustness, boldness, innovativeness etc. (Rachman, 1990; Walton, 1986). Risk involves both the possibility of losing something and gaining something (Sookermary et al., 2015).

The way in which risk is seen and addressed is by no means objective or neutral; the combination of social actions and culture appears to form the basis of the way in which different levels of risk are tolerated, levels such as risk-avoidance, risk-acceptance, risk-taking, or risk-seeking (Sookermary et al., 2015). On an individual and societal level, the perception of risk will be floating and thus change over time and space. Soldiers on their first patrol in high-risk areas may sense the feeling of risk, being absorbed and perhaps even limited in their performance due to that. Getting more experience on missions can change the perception to another level, and the experience of risk can of course differ from person to person. Two soldiers may disagree in what they experience risky or not. Today's 'normal' behavior towards risk is trying to control it in the sense of minimizing it through structural and objective measures. The norm of the modern man can be understood to be 'risk-avoiding' and 'safety-seeking'. In contrast 'risk-taking' has to be accepted and developed as a key factor only under certain conditions, for instance during military training and operations (Sookermary et al., 2015).

So how define a high-risk context? Let me outline two examples. In one of the Danish Armed Forces' theatres of operations (Afghanistan), it is necessary to move soldiers (e.g. military advisers) from point A to point B. On basis of military intelligence and the enemy's courses of action, NATO risk assessment has decided, that it in certain high-risk areas requires three heavily armoured mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles including nine specially trained soldiers armed with pistols, automatic rifles, light machine guns and grenade launchers and several secret communication systems to move or transport a single soldier. This is due to the high risk of a vehicle being attacked by e.g. a vehicle-borne, personal-borne or magnetic improvised explosive device followed up by a sniper attack or further suicidal attacks. If one vehicle is destroyed, it requires two vehicles to evacuate dead and wounded soldiers and sensitive equipment, and at the same time being able to counter further enemy attacks. As another example, some of the NATO bases in e.g. Afghanistan are located close to each other – less than 500 meters. Due to the high risk of the 500 meters movement on a foot patrol, armed helicopters are used instead and the 'passengers' have to be fully armed and wearing full protective equipment. The direct flight takes less than two minutes, but normally a bit longer due to deception reasons.

Summary

The paragraphs in this section have addressed how leadership can be understood as a phenomenon and how the understanding of leadership has evolved from being i.e. 'heroic' to a more contextualized and socially constructed phenomenon, where leadership is not inherent a certain individual. The special circumstances of military leadership and its relation to contextual high-risk danger in an environment characterized of instability, chaos, uncertainty and destruction has been discussed, and the terms risk and high-risk have been elaborated. Risk seems to be an important concept as it is constructed and cannot be seen as an objective phenomenon. The context is therefore essential in the interpretation of risk. E.g. the use of heavily armoured vehicles can produce a higher degree of risk and what ought to be a defensive stance or approach can actually produce an aggression. Therefore, soldiers have to be conscious about the fact that their own behaviour and conduct can produce less or more risk. Being friendly and accommodating to the locals can reduce the risk. As a soldier told me during an operation where we during a break chatted with some local Afghan soldiers:

“Jakob, what we are doing here is the best form of protection we can have. Becoming a kind of friends with them [the Afghan soldiers], they do not want to shoot us. If something is wrong, they will have more confidence and trust in telling us what is going on. It is the best local security we can get. Show them respect of their country and their language.”

The aim of this section was to set the foundation for my reflections about researching leadership in a military high-risk context, which the next section will try to clarify.

Methodology and Data Collection

The following section will try to explain how I conduct my in-situ research in Danish military high-risk teams in Afghanistan. How I use an embedded in situ qualitative approach is discussed, and my daily research work and reflections about it is analysed. As co-creation has influence on practice, it is necessary as a researcher to get absorbed in the process of the sensemaking processes, which are highlighted. The usability of my method in a military context as well as the advantages, values and possibilities of the method are discussed, and questions like what this type of research can say something about, is answered. My reflections from the field e.g. the risk of going too native in the field is described by a couple of examples. In connection with that, the limitations of insider research is addressed. The section will thus suggest possible alternative ways of conducting qualitative research using the benefice of insider access to military organizations.

Leadership in high-risk contexts remains one of the least addressed areas of leadership research (Bangari, 2014). Because most of the literature on high-risk leadership is theoretical (Dixon, Weeks, Boland Jr, & Perelli, 2017) it is important to examine how leadership is conducted in practice. The lack of research in this area is due to the fact that these environments are very unpredictable for both leaders and researchers, and access to units conducting deployment and combat missions is very limited, particularly in the early stages of engagement (Bangari, 2014). Therefore, most research is not situated and does not take place in situ. The newly rather comprehensive study of Dixon et al. (2017) where they interviewed soldiers at West Point who had recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan in an attempt to capture the lived experience during in extremis contexts, is an example hereof. Their study was not in situ, and given the context and the reflective nature of the data, Dixon et al. (2017) used a narrative analysis approach to examine the data, which was a combination of interviews conducted face-to-face, and by telephone.

How do I do the Research and what does the Data consist of?

This paragraph will describe and discuss how I prepared myself, what type of data I gather and how I use an embedded in situ qualitative approach.

My empirical research-in-progress is based on extensive periods of ethnographic fieldwork, where I participate and observe a diversity of training and tactical procedures and processes. I am an active duty officer in the Danish Defence having more than 25 years of military experience. The purpose of the fieldwork is to gain a somewhat ‘accurate’³ understanding of how Danish military high-risk teams train and operate in a high-risk environment with an emphasis on the leadership visible in action. It is complexity-sensitive research where the methodology does not reduce the complexity, but rather increases it as the empirical data constantly pushes boundaries to my understanding of concepts.

³ By ‘accurate’ I mean in the sense of the possibility to document what was actually said (sound recordings) and done (video recordings) in the in-situ situation.

Before entering the high-risk context, I have prepared myself in especially two ways. Firstly, I have trained with the military unit in question and its soldiers, participated in field exercises and live firing exercises, and thereby particularly gained confidence and trust with the soldiers. Secondly, at the same occasions, I have tested my concepts in terms of technical equipment and research approach. I have reflected on e.g. how it is possible to observe leadership in practice, and what questions that would be suitable to initiate a dialogue, and how, when and where should I ask questions? How is it possible to be dismounted to carry a rifle ready to fire and being situational aware of what tactical is going on and – at the same time – conduct sound recorded field interviews without leading the soldier's attention away from the tactical situation? Or while being mounted in a very noisy armoured vehicle driving through difficult terrain or traffic, when is it appropriate to initiate a dialogue and how do you get it on tape? On basis of that 'exercise experience', I have during the research in situ constantly and carefully adjusted my procedures and approach, and for instance asked myself: 'With exact the soldiers in this team and in this specific context, what questions and dialogue would be meaningful to have right now?'

My data consist of overall three different types – observations, participation and conversations. Observation is what I see and hear and what is possible to record. I can see what the soldiers actually do. In participation, my own experience, feelings and reflections are included. I have an awareness of myself and can see myself as an actor in the field. As a researcher, I can reflect on what is going on in me as a soldier and use it as data. I have access to subjectivity and how things actually make sense. Consequently, the observations are intensified, when I get alert. Conversations are talks, interviews and dialogues and often retrospective reflections on what has happened in situ. Being in situ in these contexts gives me the possibility to observe and participate, and when possible having conversations, which is unique. How e.g. risk is constructed and assessed in situ is not possible to study in post hoc interviews. Being in situ I am part of how risk is understood, constructed and negotiated as it happens.

As an example of both observation and participation, during a reconnaissance operation there was a certain alertness about the potential risk, which was co-organized. Our task as a Danish unit together with some NATO advisors was to scout a bridge and an Afghan Check Point, and we were supposedly the only NATO unit in the area. Suddenly the area was crowded with Afghan police, Danish soldiers, 'our' advisors, Turkish and British units. I was standing at the bridge with two Danish leaders observing the confusion as the overall leader in charge says to me: "*There is maximal confusion right now!*". I agree, and the other leader transmits to all the soldiers on the radio: "*No advisors are allowed to leave our bubble of security. Be aware of that!*". The confusion increases with more military and civilian vehicles turning up, and he continues on the radio: "*All must change their radio frequency to channel four and avoid talking if not strictly necessary!*". Another team leader shows up and asks: "*What is going on?*" and the overall leader in charge says: "*Do not know*". If something happens during this episode, I can see the potential risk of totally chaos with so many stakeholders at the same spot, and I look around for the nearest appropriate cover. Then, the overall leader in charge says on the radio: "*Before this turns into total chaos – right now we have Turkish, British, Danish and Afghan units – if something happens, you must stick to your positions to avoid green on green⁴ or green on blue⁵, get down and retain your positions until we get an overview of the situation. Out*".

This example has to do with potentiality – nobody was shooting at us but it was a probability. We perceive the same situation differently, and the view is developed collectively. By observing and participating, I get access to how the construction process takes place, and I am actually part of the production. The production of how risk is constructed and assessed in situ, how sensemaking is negotiated and communicated in situ,

⁴ Green on green: typically local forces opening fire on their comrades.

⁵ Green on blue: typically, an attack where a local police officer or soldier fires on coalition forces in Afghanistan.

and how action is aligned and coordinated in situ. I am in situ studying the in situ production of the experiences later normally narrated in post hoc interviews.

All the data is gathered in Afghanistan in the period January to March 2018. The empirical material consists of 15 field interviews during operations (individual or focus group, on patrol or driving in armoured vehicles), seven focus group interviews in military camps and four individual in depth interviews (up to two hours) in military camps as well as 20 verbal orders, eight after action reviews, seven briefings and instructions. All elements are recorded by sound and/or video. The figures are summed up in the table below.

The observations for more than 40 + days thus range from formal orders where I merely observed, to participating in actual operations. All these observations add to my knowledge about how leadership is practised in military high-risk teams. The observations and my immediate reflections are documented in more than 100 pages of field notes written down no longer than 48 hours after the events, in general in the evening of the same day.

Subject	Minutes	Remarks
Verbal Orders	624	20 verbal orders for tactical manoeuvres.
Field Interviews	1.635	15 interviews not all directly qualitative, e.g. periods without talking while driving in difficult terrain or traffic.
After Action Reviews	195	8 after action reviews. An after action review concludes every mission.
Instructions	70	E.g. fragmentary orders to the team given when time is limited.
Briefings	156	A combination of general information and recapitulation of small different issues.
Meetings	129	E.g. spontaneous gatherings about this and that.
Platoon Meetings	132	Normally lead by the platoon leader where all privates and NCO ⁶ s are gathered.
NCO Meetings	48	E.g. coordination between the NCOs in different platoons in order to standardise procedures where weapons and equipment are shared.
'Classical' Interviews	758	11 individual and focus group interviews.
Video Recordings	991	E.g. orders, after action reviews, patrols and reconnaissance tasks, which are used e.g. as a part of follow-up interviews.
Total minutes of observation (550 hours)	33.000	Participating in e.g. live firing, training and field exercises before deployment is not included.
Field notes		Over 100 typewritten pages.
Total minutes	37.738	

Table 1: Amount of electronic and written data gathered.

Empirical Data from the Field

The following paragraph is an extract of a 'thick description' of my daily research work in the field, and it unfolds how the three types of data are gathered.

⁶ Non-commissioned officer.

After a long drive, we arrive at the site, which is an area with new drainage ditches and quite new buildings surrounded by T-walls and barbed wire. Before I dismount the vehicle, I turn on my helmet camera. Two soldiers, the team leader, the British colonel, the Danish military interpreter and I enter the building where the meeting with an Afghan minister is going to take place. The building is full of tortuous hallways and corridors, and soldiers and civilian security contractors from other countries are also present in the building. We check the room; e.g. accessibility, the local guards, their handling of weapons, escape routes and the possibilities for evacuation or making a stronghold etc. The team leader and I leave the building and return to the rest of the team. On the radio, he explains the decor of the building, and he instructs the team in relation to the use of QRF⁷ and a roster is made by the second in command of the team. On a tactical level, I am wondering why they have not immediately parked the vehicles in the driving direction in case something should happen, and we have to leave in a hurry. Out of a consideration for the dynamics of the team, I choose to suppress my thoughts. They might perceived it as an inappropriate intervening in the way they do their tactical work causing some tarnish to the relation between the soldiers and me. I have a long conversation with the team leader about this and that, and all the time I reflect on the conversation and how it contribute to the research project.

With the camera still recording, the team leader and I relieve the two other soldiers on time in the building according to the roster. Here, my role as a soldier is 100 % in focus. When entering the room, I scan the surroundings with an increased attentiveness on any changes from the first time I was in the room, and considering where possible threats like a suicide bomber could turn up. I re-check the safety catch on my weapon and re-secure that the magazine is attached properly. I do not feel afraid, but very attentive. It is almost like another day at work. I do not feel a strong different feeling when entering the operational environment. My experience of working in high-risk environments for decades manifest itself. I am fit, I have checked my gear, and I know where it is and how to use it. It gives me equanimity and confidence. By being in control of the more physical things, it helps me handling my feelings - my many deeply rooted structures may reduce suddenly emerging anxiety. They give us a quick brief about the situation, who is leaving and entering the room, how do the other coalition soldiers and private security contractors behave, and how they perceive the state of affairs with respect to our two paxs. On my own initiative, I check the room, windows, how many doors, are they locked, who is in the room, what kind of weapons are inside the room etc. The team leader and I agree on who is going to do what, if something happens. If we have to evacuate, he will take care of the colonel, and I will cover him by fire, and open the right door with my left hand whereupon they will exit the room. While being observant and alert, we talk with low voices about his experiences with good and bad leadership. While talking, we do not look much at each other, but have our attention outwards in the room following all movements and changes. We still have our radio earpieces in our ears constantly listening on the tactical net to signals from the other team members, e.g. people with or without weapons entering and leaving the building. On the radio net, a soldier suggests moving the vehicles to another place, indicating precisely where, and he also asks for permission to take off the helmets and use a 'soft hat' instead. The team leader approves it on the radio saying: "It is bought". After half an hour, we are relieved and I turn off my camera as we leave the building. Since they had invited me to actively participate in the tactical mission, I have a good sense of being fully accepted by the team and I feel that I have contributed to the team taking a turn making it possible for one of the other soldiers to relax.

I find my vehicle, drink some water, eat a snack bar and make some field notes in my notebook. The driver is very curious and he starts a conversation with me. I turn on my microphone. In relation to leadership, he thinks that leadership here in the unit is very 'floating' compared to what he experienced as a conscript. He says:

⁷ Characteristic of any military operation is the planning and possible use of a reserve unit if an unforeseen incident should occur. Typically, this unit is called QRF – Quick Reaction Force.

“Here everybody can do everything, and everybody knows everything. When something happens, everybody is equally and the first and best contact report initiates action. It is not always the sergeant who has the overview of the situation. Of course, the sergeant has an education, but many soldiers are more qualified than the sergeant is. Our sergeant is very good at following the more experienced soldiers and he deposits a lot of trust in them. Everybody knows what we are doing and how the task should be solved”.

I am thinking that his statement is spot on in comparison with my own observations on the in situ leadership taking place so far, and we continue the talk for another ten minutes. Then we have to leave and I turn off my microphone.

After return to base, we park and unload the vehicles, and I participate in the team’s after action review with my microphone turned on. It takes place in the briefing room, and I am sitting in the corner of the room, and we are all still in full combat gear. In sessions like this, I take a rather passive and observant role unless I really feel I have something to offer. A team leader, who participated in the mission, has temporarily taken over the team and is going to be the team leader the following weeks. During the after action review process he asks the team members: *“Are you used to plan a roster before you leave the base?”* The members are used to that, and the leader introduces another method, and concludes: *“It can be a possibility for you to use this method, but if the other method works for you, then that is what you do.”* During the mission of the day, we had experienced some difficulties finding the right way into an Afghan base, and the leader asks the commander of the forward vehicle to explain what happened: *“Could you give us a little explanation about what happened when we could not enter the site?”*. The soldier explains the team that the intelligence information he had received did not correspond with the terrain, and that he therefore had to adjust the route while we were driving. After arriving at the site, he had contacted the local Site Security Cell (SSC) and informed them about the challenges we experienced, but SSC said that normally it was not a problem. *“Perhaps we missed something on the route”*, he says, and continues: *“I would like the other vehicle commanders to be more alert and read the map and our routes when driving”*. Without mentioning it directly, he probably invited the other members to help him in navigating in difficult terrain. One of the other vehicle commanders says: *“I agree with you”* and the team leader says in a nice and quiet way: *“Can I add something? We are all recon soldiers and every vehicle has to know where it is. Vehicle commanders must know where they are, the same with the drivers. I will suggest those of you not familiar with the city and the routes to read up on it. It is to the benefice of the whole team.”* I sense that some of the soldiers feel a little ashamed not doing their job good enough, but nobody responds.

How to handle the Experience of Risk as a Military Researcher?

This paragraph will briefly touch how to cope with feelings in a risky research environment. In the extract above, I analyzed the situation i.e. by scanning the room asking myself what is likely to happen here. Together with the team leader, we made a plan so we in details knew who was going to do what in case of an increase in risk. The use of the QRF was coordinated; a back-up plan was ready and the constant use of communication systems gave insight of what was going on outside the room. All these actions, reflections, considerations and experiences make it possible to handle and to some extent – in my case – control my feelings. The feeling of being in control decreased the experience of risk. It is a medley of the military training, the discipline, and the routines making it possible to be present in the moment and not ending up being overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety and fear. Working in a high-risk environment may be a frightening experience, where it is imperative that emotions are handled in a constructive and meaningful way. The military training makes it possible to identify risks e.g. by being aware of potential combatants, having situational awareness and a well-developed sense of deviance and changes in the operational settings. Listening to more experienced soldiers makes it possible to transfer experiences to your own context and here consider what can go wrong and how incidents can be handled. It is of vital importance that you trust

yourself, others and your equipment. Having self-knowledge and being self-confident may improve the ability to react appropriate e.g. not overestimate your own abilities and resources.

How does this Method fit in the Field of Studies in Military Leadership?

The next two paragraphs will discuss the usability of my method in a military context as well as the advantages, values and possibilities of the method, and questions like what are the values of this type of research and what can this type of research say something about, are answered.

Studies of leadership employ a variety of methodologies ranging from large-scale surveys, classic experiments, in-depth interviews, and case studies. Recently, critically oriented methodological debates about how to best study leadership have suggested that leadership should be explored as socially constructed, performative and relational (e.g. (Grint, 2005) in (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013)), and that a position of sympathy and identification with those under study is not categorically problematic and, in many cases, is necessary for understanding the emotionality of the scene (Tracy, 2012). The close relationship between researcher and participant can be seen as a resource, but before being a resource, it has to be transparent.

My research is qualitative and phenomenologically inspired and is interested in the subjective actions and not least in the meaning subjective actors attach to different actions. My working research question indicates that the meaning aspect is central to my interest. Practice is produced in a process where meaning is co-created and negotiated between actors in the leading space. As co-creation has influence on practice, it is necessary for me as a researcher to get absorbed in the process of this sensemaking process. This suggests an anthropological and ethnographic approach in the sense that I am interested in how actors themselves produce the practice of leadership and cooperation, and central in this process is how they make sense of and understand their 'social world'. Working anthropologically, naturally, my research has to take place in situ, in this case in Afghanistan, and my research fills in the gap mentioned by many scholars and exemplified even in the latest research in the field (e.g. Dixon et al., 2017). Qualitative research has its focus on phenomena and people and its emphasis on words over numbers, facilitates discovery versus testing of variables (Dixon, Weeks, Boland Jr, & Perelli, 2017). My errands here are not trying to identify and explaining causal contexts, but to interpret, understand and characterize subjective universes of meaning. In this perspective, the task of my research is to try to capture the complexity that characterizes the emergence of the phenomenon that is in the focus of my research, and describe the complexity and ambiguity with as many facets as possible making the methodology complex-sensitive. In this perspective, the field of research is never given independent of social processes and the specific context, but is constructed continuously, for example through the way people talk about the world which is why the constructed reality is both ambiguous and unstable (Mik-Meyer, 2010). As a qualitative inspired researcher, I find it obvious that my presence and experience can be seen as a resource.

Advantages, Possibilities and Values of this Research Approach

One of the great advantages of participant observation is that it is possible to observe interaction as it unfolds in practice. It provides a special opportunity to analyze the meaning of the context for human actions and attitudes, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of the explored phenomenon. Similarly, participant observation can provide knowledge of 'tacit knowledge' as it becomes possible to spot things that are taken for granted in the organization to such an extent that you do not think about it in daily life, and therefore do not mention it in an interview or when filling out a questionnaire.

The situation mentioned in the extract with 'my role as a soldier is 100 %' is an example of active participation, and how we cooperate. We co-operatively manage the duality of attending – we are alert on

what is going on in the room, on our talk and balancing it so the talk is not going to be a disturbance. We have co-orientation to the room. By e.g. not looking at each other, we both constantly demonstrate an understanding of what the primary task is, and that our talk is secondary. There is a tacit knowledge of what is important in this task which we remind each other about e.g. by having attention outwards. Together we handle the emotions being in a risky situation having a responsibility of the situation. Only our many years of training and discipline make this skilled competence possible. The after action review episode, where I mostly take a listening position in the corner of the room, is an example of observation, where I witness how the team together construct and co-coordinate the experiences of today (e.g. “*Could you give us a little explanation of what happened...?*”). The talk ‘in action’ with the team leader while we are securing the room, and the talk afterwards with the driver in the vehicle are examples of conversations and good contrasts to observations. The three types of data supplement each other nicely. In the conversations, the soldiers talk about what we actually are doing in the after action review process, where soft authority (e.g. “*Can I add something?*”) from the team leader and cooperation in the dialogue (e.g. “*I agree with you*”) illustrate what the driver said in the vehicle (e.g. leadership is “*floating*” and “*... everybody is equally...*”). My observations provide concrete examples and practice to the conversations, and through my participation and ‘rapport’, I get better access to their social world and to the practice where the soldiers’ in situ experience is created. In my research, I am especially interested in practice and in analyzing the methods people use for organizing their everyday life in a meaningful and orderly way – how they make everyday life work. As King (2006) puts it: ‘If the social sciences wish to provide convincing explanations of the military, they must focus above all else on what soldiers distinctively do’ (King, 2006, p. 510). Being in situ, I get access to otherwise inaccessible data and therefore a more comprehensive understanding of how ‘things work’. My participant observation makes i.e. a following interview guide more detailed, nuanced and sophisticated due to the use of concrete examples. Furthermore, I get in contact with other thematics, which may surprise me and which I do not see the importance of, before I am present. Themes you could not understand if you were not present. I observe practice and actions that could not be foreseen, giving an opportunity to explore not just what happened, but the accounts for it made by themselves. Being present makes it possible to ask questions, even though it was not planned. My presence adds value because I access new data sources.

The following is an example of combining observation and conversation in my research. Due to sudden enemy actions during an operation, we are once again stuck at another base without proper equipment including sleeping bags etc. Despite the situation, the atmosphere is good, and the team leader gives an update about the situation in a small room stuffed with e.g. rifles, radios, backpacks, protective equipment, a closet, a freezer, three sofas and a TV. The team is expected to carry out two tasks tomorrow, but we need some operational classified information in order to be able to conduct the tasks. At this base, we do not have access to the classified network, and the team leader’s colleague at the main base posts the required classified information on the team’s internal Messenger group. Due to my background as an officer I know, it is not strictly by the rules but a good example of how it works if it is going to work. A couple of days later, I have a follow-up interview with the two team leaders. The interview is, among other things, about the mentioned episode. One leader explains that it was the easiest solution, and compared to the risk it was worth doing it in that way. He says:

“As reconnaissance soldiers, we go to great length to solve the task - even when compromised with security issues. You must often move a little outside the boundaries. We are often violating some rules in order to solve business. I am convinced that others would have said that it is not allowed but we have another opinion. We see opportunities where other units may be more focused on limitations.”

The other team leader adds and says:

“Today I had an example with a flat tyre. I did not report it to HQ, as they probably would have said ‘stop’ to me, and launched a recovery operation. It is a balance between rules and reality. Another example today was that EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal] guy. He did not have all of his basic first aid kit with him. That is a severe violation of rules, and I have orders to reject him. However, I told him, that in future he had to carry his kit at all times, but as an exception, I accepted him to participate today. And what was my purpose with that? That next time he will remember it, and he certainly will! We do what make sense. We do not go that much into rules to get more out of the training and the soldiers.”

The examples above illustrate how the soldiers with a pragmatic approach try to make things work and make sense by seeing rules only as guidelines, and how they organize their everyday life and retrospectively co-create reality and reflect on the possibilities for rethinking their procedures and tactics.

This approach working with different sources of data gives access to an eye at what (actually)⁸ happens, such as organizing the life in a meaningful and orderly manner, an eye that is not dependent on the sensemaking of the soldiers. I see and hear what they do without themselves seeing and hearing it because they are busy with something else. They cannot see and hear, as they are very engaged in, for example, a potential threat like an Afghan having a diverging and different behaviour, which could indicate a suicide bomber. A unique eye that is not dependent on the soldiers own observation that always will be limited by the fact that the soldiers are in the middle of solving their tactical task. I get an eye on what is just invisible to them – things that are routinized, taken for granted, and what is beyond their consciousness. If I e.g. want to have a nuanced and profound understanding of the different and individual aspects of the concept of risk, which may change over time, I have to be there being able to notice and ask the soldiers about their in-situ thoughts, feelings and reflections on what is going on right now. During my field work, I interviewed some young soldiers before and after their first ‘real’ mission in a high-risk context. As three different soldiers formulated it:

“It is stupid not to be afraid. It is important to be afraid. You have to embrace that anxiety of death. That is what drives you to do your best. Of course, you are not scared to death all the time, but you have it constantly in your head”, and “... Yesterday I got a little scared when we got the security briefing. When we saw the photos of VBIED [Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device] and PBIED [Personal Borne Improvised Explosive Device], I thought ‘shit’, it is happening just on the other side of the wall, and it can happen to us as it happened to them [A Danish team which was attacked by a VBIED a couple of months before]. A couple of thoughts are going through your head – is it worth it?”, and lastly “... we must find our own meaning of being here.”

Their first expectations and fantasies about risk changed over a couple of missions and were normalized so to speak. I get examples of how soldiers have different views on risk, and how leadership practice can influence that experience. In short, being there helps answering my working research question, as it fleshes it out, and gives more substance to the understanding of the field.

So what are the values of this type of research? By e.g. sharing the same conditions, I gain confidence and acceptance in the field. By being close to the soldiers, talking about ‘it’⁹ with them, I get access to a special knowledge and the soldiers get a better insight into what data ‘I need’, and soldiers can better connect

⁸ I have put the word ‘actually’ in brackets because there is, of course, multiple views and understandings of what ‘actually’ happens. Most actors will have slightly different perceptions of what they experience happening.

⁹ As described in the first section about leadership many terms, concepts and understandings can be included in the comprehension of leadership, that is why I write ‘it’.

themselves with my world as a researcher. As one soldier said to me, when I missed an opportunity to observe a meeting between the team leaders: “*Jakob, you really missed that meeting, you would have loved to observe it*”. The team leader and I gradually knew each other better and better, and he had developed a good sense of what might be of interest for my research project. There is a co-creation of the research as my own and the field's understanding and a priori are exposed to 'criticism' – what the soldiers take for granted, they suddenly have to think about and argue for, and so do I. It exposes both my own and the field's pre-understanding and 'taken for granted' for criticism, and the world is reinterpreted in a shared meaning creation process. It is not only me as a researcher, but also the field that critically addresses each other. This is seen in relation to the fact that in 'traditional research' the field is exposed to a critical view of the researcher, but in my approach, I am also exposed to a critical look. After a couple of weeks in the theatre, a soldier e.g. told me, that he had seldom met an officer like me with good soldiery manners, who was properly dressed in his uniform and who was in control of all his weapons and his own equipment. That gave him confidence in me, and opened a door into his world, which now was accessible for me as a researcher. Therefore, it gives an opportunity to reinterpret the field to which the soldiers are a part. By experiencing the world with them, I can reinterpret their world through them. When we talk about a tactical task to be solved, a shared sensemaking can be made. 'Traditionally', the researcher will slip out of the field, and the researcher and the field are left to themselves and they each create their own meaning. But how close to practice should I be?

Reflections from the Field – the Dilemmas, Possibilities and Challenges

The last paragraphs in this section describe some of my reflections from the field e.g. the risk of going too native in the field, and in connection with that, the limitations of insider research is addressed.

I have the advantages of already being familiar with the scene and of understanding a wealth of background information. However, a primary dilemma is how involved I should become in the scene, but detachment seems to be not only impossible, but also unethical (Tracy, 2013). I believe that my experience in the field provides intuition and courage on questions to ask in order to facilitate a more meaningful generation of knowledge. Thus, while there is a risk of preconceived mental models interfering with my abductive¹⁰ approach, I do believe that the benefits of trust and an intuitive understanding of the organizational culture provides great benefit and possibility to the process of sensemaking (Allen & Kayes, 2012). But my background taken into consideration may limit fresh insights, and I have to navigate the power and personality issues that come with my position (e.g. interview responses may be affected by the fact that I am an officer and the interviewees are subordinates) (Tracy, 2013). In the beginning of my research, some soldiers saw me more as an officer than a researcher, but as time passed by I blended more and more with the teams becoming an almost integrated part of the interactions.

The risk of going too native is obvious. As an insider, I may have preconceived assumptions and may not go deep enough in interviews to pull out the multiple meanings attached to an experience. I may identify myself with in the environment with such an intensity that I become an integral part of it, losing my research perspective and thereby making a scientific analysis difficult. I risk over-identification with the field, making it difficult to study it from the outside. Being careful not ending as a native observer or participant during my fieldwork, I tried to be very aware of not ending in this position and I i.e. tried to take breaks from observation and participation, withdraw from the action to reflect and analyse (Gold, 1958). Most evenings I

¹⁰ My research strategy is abductive in the sense that I am basically not absorbed by developing or testing general laws, and I do not necessarily follow a certain series of steps in a prior defined order. However, I try to have focus on the contexts activating or resulting in my causes of wonder.

‘locked myself up’ in a primitive supply room and wrote field notes and reflected on what had happened during the day resulting in new questions, ideas and wonderings to examine. Also, the use of my supervisor at a distance by means of emails was helpful, as I was a soldier among soldiers, with a probability of losing foci of the primary task – doing research and not conducting military operations. Twice a week, I emailed drafts of my field notes that were commented and questioned resulting in a more reflexive stance and adaptive development of the research approach.

Trying to be a self-reflexive researcher, I carefully consider how my culture, age, gender, and physical appearance will be interpreted by other soldiers. During my research, I have critically considered my own ego and the extent to which I am willing to adapt in order for soldiers to accept me. A consideration for me was e.g. whether or not I should wear my insignia of rank. Being a major can for some soldiers evoke or trigger certain memories, feelings or reactions, and the normal attributes or privileges being a major are non-existent in the role of a researcher, as I have no right to command and control the soldiers nor is it expected for me to do so. Furthermore, for many years, I have trained military leaders at many levels and many things influence my approach to (military) leadership. Theories have partly formed my approach to leadership and combined with my extensive experience I have an idea of which theories are useful in a military context. Also, my master’s degree in organizational psychology, my own experience in leading that type of a special military unit and my part time work as a mountain guide, make it possible to observe leadership in another different not only military view. In conclusion, my approach to leadership is not only based on my being/job as an officer, but also the experience I have gained through many other activities.

In a research project like this, there are many stakeholders and different expectations to me as e.g. a researcher, an officer or a colleague. Therefore, working so close to practice also has some ethical challenges and many considerations. Typical examples I would have to consider is if I observe and/or record unethical – or even illegal – behavior and boundary transgression. Now and then, I heard and experienced things, which in my perspective was inappropriate, but nevertheless something I did not respond to. For instance soldiers nicknaming the local women as ‘tents’ (with a reference to the burka) or men disparage woman soldiers as ‘dick less’. An example is my reflections on whether or not I should comment or intervene on the tactical behavior and decisions, e.g. how to park the vehicles tactically. Another example of the difficulties and challenges in the role of being an embedded insider participant observer is an email correspondence after my fieldwork with a high-ranking officer based in Denmark. He had been helpful as a gatekeeper getting access to the field, and I emailed him and told him, that I had had a fruitful stay with the unit in Afghanistan. He was curious about the performance of the unit writing: “*Did you by the way see anything I have to pay attention to?*”. I know the officer beforehand and understand his question very well, but working under informed content and the ethical considerations related to that, refrains me from giving him my subjective experiences and feedback of my personal and professional assessment of the unit’s tactical level. Even if my assessment is good or bad, it will compromise the confidentiality and trust obtained between me – as a researcher – and the unit.

Limitations of this Research Approach

So what is obviously difficult in this type of research? Being an embedded insider ethnographic researcher is like attending a dinner party. As a good guest, the researcher accepts an offer to be a part of the company and not simply paying lip service to the host (Jensen, 2003). As a guest, the researcher temporarily takes a double position: He is at once inside and outside the company, a stranger but thus recognizable, neither pure distance nor pure repetition. It is expected of the guest that he is able to move between the obvious and the un-obvious and thus put something ‘at stake’. The researcher even has to invest in this ‘non-compliance’ with predictability and the familiar – he is aiming for something to occur, otherwise it will be too boring. So

how do I invite myself to the party? How do I understand and ‘hook up’ and contribute to the party not only paying lip service, but on the other hand not being too critical and insulting the party, whereas I will be decoupled. It is like balancing on a knife's edge. I must not get uninteresting and I often have to consider whether I can take the liberty of asking a question – or if it will be going too native (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). It is important constantly to consider whether a conversation creates trust and a good relationship.

My research can only be presented as just one possible ‘reading’ and therefore generalization seems inappropriate to discuss, as qualitative studies rarely achieve the required degree of precision in representative sampling, and do not aspire to (Bazeley, 2013). I try to create possible understandings that may be transferred from one context to another depending upon the degree of ‘fit’ between the contexts (Flick, 2013; Tracy, 2013). Therefore, to talk about the concept of transferability¹¹ seems to be more adequate, as it does not require the discovery of the general conditions under which a finding or a theory is valid. Instead, it involves a transfer of knowledge from a study to a specific new situation. This shifts the responsibility for making generalizations from the researcher to the reader or potential user of the findings (Flick, 2013). As Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2013) write: “... any transfer of a study’s findings to other contexts is the responsibility of the reader, not the researcher. The findings must include enough thick descriptions for readers to assess the potential transferability and appropriateness for their own settings.” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013, p. 314). A full and thick description of the context in which a study takes place is necessary not only for understanding the case, but also to allow case-to-case transfer of the knowledge gained, the application of theoretical insights to a new setting or to facilitate further analysis and understanding through replicative or comparative studies (Bazeley, 2013). Often one can make out something about e.g. processes, and no matter what, learning will take place, and in this process of transfer, an active translation from one context to another is, of course, imperative.

In this main section about methodology and data collection, I have tried to suggest possible alternative ways of conducting qualitative research using the benefice of insider access to military organizations. There are pros and cons in respect to this approach, and there is no quick fix to the methods most suitable. In the end, it is about possibilities of access, the researcher’s preferences and the type of phenomenon to be examined. The last section will offer some concluding remarks and I will very briefly address some possible theoretically contributions and the future research of my project is described.

Concluding Remarks and Theoretical Contributions

By providing descriptions and analyses of how leadership is practiced as an in situ accomplishment, I may be able to provide a practical cutting edge to research on leadership in a military context based on what ‘actually’ (see footnote 7) happens in the military high-risk teams. This knowledge may allow practitioners to become more aware of the way in which leadership is practiced and, ultimately, lead to an improvement in leadership practices at work (Clifton, 2009).

In my view there is no fixed point from which qualitative research must be considered most appropriate and legitimate, and people will construct their own sense of what good research is, which will privilege their own understanding and sensemaking processes (Cassell, Bishop, Symon, Johnson, & Buehring, 2009). The social world is always changing, and therefore, contextual explanations and situated meanings are integral to

¹¹ The term transferability was introduced by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as an alternative to generalization, specially to refer to case-by-case transfer of knowledge – the only form they see as legitimate (Bazeley, 2013, p. 410).

ongoing sensemaking (Tracy, 2013). During my research, I am absorbed in the context, and I can see my study as what Welch et al. (2011) call 'interpretive sensemaking' where I try to understand the particular rather than generate law-like explanations. For example the episode at the bridge where the leaders in situ through their dialogue ascribe meaning to their own understanding of the potential risk, where I am a part of the context. Or the after action review process, where a soldier explains what happened with the navigation challenges and the soldiers retrospectively make sense of the episode. My aim is to produce thick descriptions and appreciate how the social context imbues human action with meaning.

Team leadership research has typically focused on the role of an individual leading the team (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). Scholars have recently become more interested in plural forms of leadership (Denis et al., 2012) where more than one individual contributes in some way to leadership tasks. Terms such as 'shared leadership' (Pearce & Conger, 2003), 'distributed leadership' (Gronn, 2002) and 'collective leadership' (Denis et al., 2001) have emerged to describe variants of this phenomenon (Storey, 2017). So far, the preliminary findings of the research indicate that leadership practiced in the high-risk teams make use of the concepts about shared and distributed leadership. In shared leadership, leadership is conceptualized as a shared property of the team and anyone can participate in the process which has been illustrated e.g. with team leaders involving soldiers in orders, and soldiers involving themselves. As one of the soldiers said, he experienced leadership in the team as '*floating*' and that "*the first and best contact report initiates action*". The soldiers do not have to wait for the formal leader to take a decision, and shared leadership can be viewed as a process versus a person engaging multiple members of the team. The term shared leadership overlaps with relational and complexity leadership, and differs from more traditional, hierarchical, or vertical models of leadership. Although a number of authors have discussed the idea of shared leadership, it has only gained attention in the academic leadership literature recently, and relatively few studies have tried to address the concept of shared leadership (Avolio et al., 2009; Storey, 2017).

The purpose of this paper was to discuss the methodology in a study with the following evolving working research question: how does Danish military high-risk teams practice leadership, and what makes it possible? The paper has gained an insight into my in-progress research and I have tried to describe and argue for the use of qualitative in-situ methods and thereby fill out the gap of in-situ situated research in this area.

In my perspective, it is imperative that research in the Danish Defence is useful and meaningful for practice, and some sort of improvement is produced. The described methodology makes this process easier because the research already is coupled to practice. I see it as a constant and ongoing process in creating good leadership in the Danish Defence, and thereby enrich practice with research, and vice versa research being enriched by practice.

Next step in the research project is a follow-up period in Afghanistan in June 2018, where I again will embed the unit and try to go deeper into the findings and follow the opportunity to validate some of the findings by introducing practice to some of my thoughts and learn if they may recognize the preliminary analyzed data. In autumn 2018, I will continue to have the same focus on the phenomenon – leadership in military high-risk teams – but the scope will change in the sense that I will change branch and type of military high-risk team. I will embed myself in a helicopter crew team operating from a Danish Navy vessel in the stormy and icy waters of the North Atlantic.

Future military leadership and risk-related research needs to keep close contact with the military practice field. The comprehensive research bibliography of Sookermany, Sand, & Breivik (2015) indicates that only a third of the peer-reviewed articles (n=139) were published in journals that are military specific in their aims,

and the dominance is of quantitative research. They point that to be relevant and close to the practice field, we need qualitative studies and they welcome more of this type of research in the future. Specific military situations and highly specialized military operations demand context-sensitive research, and qualitative studies here may be important. My research project is a humble try to fill in this gap.

IN PROGRESS

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