Cross-sectoral Crisis Preparedness and Response: An Organizationality Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Crisis preparedness and response require coordination among diverse actors. Traditional crisis management literature emphasizes the ad-hoc and temporary nature of crisis collaborations, but thereby overlooks the extent to which crisis response builds on pre-existing structures and relationships. This paper applies the concept of organizationality—divided into structural and entitative organizationality—to analyze multi-actor crisis management in Sweden. Drawing on three qualitative real event case studies—a ferry grounding, a flooding incident and a forest fire—we demonstrate how organizationality can be used to understand crisis collaboration. The three cases illustrate strong entitative organizationality, enabling coordinated crisis response despite relatively weak but still present structural frameworks rooted in pre-existing institutional arrangements. Organizationality showcases how crisis management relies on latent structural conditions, but also needs trust and actorhood. In contexts like Sweden, where crisis management lacks hierarchical command structures, entitative organizationality plays a critical role in ensuring coordination.

Keywords

Crisis management, organizationality, interorganizational collaboration

INTRODUCTION

The development of crisis preparedness systems has primarily been driven by public actors, but due to resource constraints, businesses and volunteer organizations are now expected to play a more active role. However, whereas public organizations can rely on formal structures to manage and coordinate responses during crises, also involving private companies and volunteer organizations means greater challenge due to their varied capabilities and motivations. Furthermore, each societal challenge is unique, requiring diverse contributions from different actors, making the creation of one common crisis organization inefficient (Van Laere, 2013). There is a logic that crisis management requires collaboration among multiple actors, since most crises mean that no single organization possesses all the necessary resources, expertise or authority to handle complex crises alone (Ansell et al., 2010; Nohrstedt et al., 2018). As a result, interorganizational crisis response has become a defining characteristic of contemporary crisis management.

A prevailing assumption in the crisis management literature is that crisis response efforts emerge spontaneously and are largely ad hoc, involving actors who may have little prior experience working together (Li & Song, 2022). The clearest example of this is the use of the concept of temporary organizations to describe these crisis collaborations, emphasizing their transient and task-specific nature (Li & Song, 2022; Nohrstedt, 2018). However, this perspective does not fully account for how crisis response networks build on pre-existing structures and relationships. In many cases, emergency response collaborations are not entirely emergent but rather involve both formal and informal networks that existed before the crisis and continue beyond it (Nohrstedt, 2018; Parker, 2020;

Røiseland & Trætteberg, 2024). These networks exhibit a degree of institutionalization, characterized by recurring interactions, established norms and recognized leadership structures (Wollebæk & Hansen, 2025). Understanding these crisis response collaborations requires moving beyond an exclusively emergent perspective and incorporating a framework that accounts for both structure and adaptability.

In this article, we analyze how the concept of organizationality (Ahrne et al., 2016; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) can be applied to better understand interorganizational crises preparedness and response. Organizationality focuses on organizing without forming complete formal organizations, but actors strive to create just enough order to establish common direction and coordination while retaining flexibility and limiting the costs associated with formal organization. In interorganizational crises response settings, diverse actors collaborate without the full structure of a formal organization, while balancing crisis response with the flexibility needed to involve a wide range of actors. We aim to showcase how organizationality can be used to study crisis management. We do this by presenting how multi-agency crisis management contains both emergent and pre-existing aspects. Organizationality highlights crisis management as both preceding and proceeding crises. Thereby it is important to avoid becoming overly result-oriented at the expense of relational goals, which are critical for the more long-term collaboration. There is always a risk in crisis management to become very focused on short-term results, which can undermine long-term conditions for the collaboration (Eriksson et al., 2020).

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Crisis management typically exceeds the capacities of individual actors, necessitating interorganizational collaboration. Unlike routine policy challenges, crises create high-pressure environments that demand immediate coordination, leaving little time for actors to establish relationships and trust gradually (Ansell et al., 2010; Nohrstedt et al., 2018). However, even though crisis management tends to involve emergent networks, these overlap with networks that are pre-existing and/or planned (Nohrstedt, 2018; Parker, 2020). There are no definite boundaries between these types of networks, as they involve actors that in some cases are spontaneously integrated ad hoc and in other cases are partners in the formal network (Røiseland & Trætteberg, 2024). Hence, arrangements for collaborative crisis management are often semi-hierarchical structures (Nohrstedt et al., 2018; Wollebæk & Hansen, 2025). These networks are a mix of centralized command and interdependent relationships among multiple autonomous organizations and calls have been made for research that examine these overlaps (Nohrstedt et al., 2018). Furthermore, since temporary systems are frequently embedded within more enduring structures such as organizations, networks or fields, the dynamics at the intersection of the temporary and the permanent—encompassing tensions, contradictions, and synergies—remain insufficiently explored and understood (Bakker et al., 2016).

Collaborative crisis management literature tends to explain collaborative management arrangements as emergent, ad-hoc and temporary. This has furthered temporary organization as a widely recognized concept applied to describe collaborative crisis management (Burke et al., 2016). Temporary organization has been described as "a specific type of organizing, which involves a group of participants who often are not familiar with one another, but are interdependent, executing a certain task for a limited period of time" (Li & Song, 2022, p.450). Hence, acknowledging that collaborating actors tend to have insufficient time to foster trust and collective identity (Li & Song, 2022).

We see potential in using the concept of organizationality in understanding interorganizational collaborative crisis management, since the concept is acknowledged as well suited to examine looser and fluid forms of organization that may lack structure or membership boundaries (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). The concept of organizationality has hardly been used at all in this domain, only in relation to crises for studying spontaneous volunteer collectives (Carius et al., 2025). Concerning the previous mentioned two sides of crisis management: on the one hand spontaneous and evolving, and on the other hand the overlap with pre-existing, more stable structures, we see potential in applying a multi-dimensional view on organizationality.as both structural and entitative. Structural organizationality refers to the structure and definition of membership, authority, rules, systems of monitoring and sanctions. Entitative organizationality refers to the defining features of the entity itself. It relates to integrating a system of decision-making, being perceived by external audiences as an actor that can be made accountable (i.e., having actorhood) and generating a sense of collective identity (Grothe-Hammer et al., 2022)

Analytical Framework: Organizationality

The concept of organizationality provides a framework for how social collectives can accomplish more or less of

organization-ness without being a complete organization (Roth Smith, 2022). Traditional organizational theories often categorize entities rigidly organizations or non-organizations, but the notion of organizationality challenges this dichotomy by introducing a continuum of "organization-ness" (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019; Roth Smith, 2022). This approach allows for a more dynamic and flexible understanding of how social entities function in terms of organizing.

We follow the view that Coulombel and Berkowitz (2024) present on partial organization and organizationality. They do not see them as two different concepts, but as two aspects of organizationality. What is otherwise labelled partial organization (e.g., Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011), they label structural organizationality and what is normally simply labelled as organizationality (e.g., Dobusch and Schoeneborn, 2015), they label entitative organizationality. We can then use structural organizationality and entitative organizationality as two analytical dimensions to use one at a time, but also to understand how they interact, and thereby better understand organizationality as a whole. Common for both aspects of organizationality are that they are decided rather than emergent (Coulombel & Berkowitz, 2024), although the *effects* of entitative organizationality are more emergent based on speech acts (Dobusch & Schoenborn, 2015).

Structural Organizationality

Structural organizationality is based on the theory of partial organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Ahrne et al., 2016). Ahrne and Brunsson (2011, p.85) suggest a definition of organization as "*a decided order in which people use elements that are constitutive of formal organizations*". Organization, therefore, includes one or more of the elements of membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions, which are objects of decision. The reasoning behind the development of the definition is that organization occurs not only within but also outside and among formal organization, without necessarily conforming to the characteristics of a network, which according to Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) is an emergent social order characterized by "*informality, lack of boundaries and hierarchical relations, and is ascribed with qualities such as spontaneity and flexibility*" (p.88). "*Complete and partial organization are not emergent, but the result of the intervention of individuals or formal organizations which can and do make decisions not only about their own, but also about the behaviour and distinctions of others.*" (p.90). Ahrne et al. (2016) argue that what distinguishes organizations from other social phenomena such as institutions and networks, which also provide some form of social order, is that organizations and organizing involve deliberate attempts to create some order, thereby enabling proactivity. Organization entails *attempts* at creating certainty, to create a specific order. The resulting order can, however, be different from the intention. Decisions create an impression of significance of certain elements. They link order to a few distinct decision-makers. In contrast, networks cannot be explained by referring to a few people only, but by reference to the collective behavior of every individual or organization that participates in the network and that responsibility is "highly diluted" (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p.91).

Partial organizations, which we use as basis for structural organizationality, differ from complete organizations in that they do possess some, but not all, elements of a fully developed organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). These elements include:

- **Membership** differs from other forms of affiliation as it does not take starting point in a web of relations and develop gradually through individual actions from its participants as in a network. Instead, a membership is decided upon. When someone is appointed to decide (at least briefly or for a certain task). This actor has the right to call to meetings and set the agenda.
- **Hierarchy** entails a decision on the source of power. Power in this sense are not similar to characteristics of power outside of an organization, but are grounded in "a right to oblige others to comply with central decisions" (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p.86).
- **Rules**, in contrast to norms, are products of explicit decisions and are primarily written and always pronounced (e.g., standards)
- **Monitoring** refers to decided monitoring efforts to ensure compliance to rules and commands (e.g., financial and management accounting systems).
- **Sanctions** are products of decision making and can be both positive (e.g., promotions, awards) and negative (e.g., withholding of promotions or salary increases).

Complete organizations have access to all these elements, while structural organizationality focus on the elements that the social entity has access to (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Coulombel & Berkowitz, 2024). It is more difficult for organizers to create a desired order if they have access to only a few organizational elements. Hence, a partial organization can form due to inability to use more than one or a few of the elements. However, partial organizations can also form because there is an advantage in not involving all elements (e.g., due to limited

resources). These elements of what we consider as structural organizationality will enable us to examine how crisis organizations form and sustain themselves in various degrees of organization-ness (cf. Roth Smith, 2022).

Entitative Organizationality

According to Dobusch and Schoeneborn (2015), organizationality (or entitative organizationality in our framework) is determined by the degree to which a social collective fulfills the minimum criteria of an organization. These criteria include:

1. Systems of decision-making – The collective exhibits structured decision-making processes (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011).
2. Actorhood – The decision-making process is recognized as belonging to a larger entity or actor (King et al., 2010).
3. Collective identity through speech acts – The entity constructs its identity through communication that defines what it is or does through identity claims (Bartel & Dutton, 2014).

This means viewing achieving degrees of organization-ness as something that emerge and evolve through communicative practices (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). Entitative organizationality draws on Communication Constitutes Organization (CCO) (Schoeneborn et al., 2014), which emphasizes how organizing is performed through discourse and interaction rather than being a static structure (Schoeneborn et al., 2019).

METHOD

We performed three qualitative case studies on preparation for and dealing with three crises with different characteristics: a ferry grounding with rescue operations and oil spill, a flooding incident and an out of the ordinary forest fire. The common nominator between the cases are multi-actor responses to the different crises. Data collection was carried out through document studies especially concerning incident reports and evaluations of management of the different crises, observations of training session on crises response and collaboration meetings as a contextual understanding, and interviews with key actors. In total 20 interviews were carried out with security coordinators in municipalities, specialists and coordinators at county boards and different authorities, rescue service leader and managers in different public organizations. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each and were all transcribed verbatim. Interviews focused on the experience of the respondents regarding the studied crises as well as general response, organizing and preparation for crises.

The analytical framework on organizationality was used to analyze the cases into what extent the collaborations achieved different degrees of organization-ness. The five elements of structural organizationality (membership, authority, rules, monitoring and sanctions) and the three aspects of entitative organizationality (systems of decision-making, actorhood, and collective identity through speech acts) were used to analyze the different cases, and they also serve as structure for the results section.

Context: The Swedish Crisis Management System

The Swedish emergency preparedness structure (SCCA, 2025) rests on the idea that a crisis should be managed locally (principle of proximity), that each actor is responsible for the duties he or she performs in non-crisis situations (principle of responsibility) and that tasks and duties should be organized and located as in peacetime (principle of parity). The municipality (local level), the county (regional level) and the government (national level) each have a geographical area of responsibility. This does not overrule sector responsibilities of other organizations, but aims to stimulate collaboration among all actors involved in a crisis at the respective level. To emphasize collaboration, the extended responsibility principle clarifies that actors should support and collaborate with each other, besides handling their own duties. At the national level, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (SCCA) supports the government in establishing a situation picture and in stimulating collaboration between involved actors.

The rationale is that actors with responsibility in peacetime are best suited to perform that task also during crises, rather than having another agency step in. At the same time, the system acknowledges the need for intensified interaction and collaboration, and therefore assigns particular agencies facilitation responsibilities. When a crisis can be contained locally (in a municipality), it is preferable that local actors, who understand the local context, manage the crisis, while assistance can be requested from higher levels. In a (inter)national crisis, the system is activated on all levels, requiring vertical coordination regarding what issues to discuss and decide nationally, and what to cover regionally and locally, enabling adaptation to local circumstances. Researchers have emphasized that Sweden's crisis management is characterized by a notable lack of hierarchy and command structures, meaning

that no actor (not even the national government) can intervene in another actor's decision-making; participation in joint crisis efforts therefore becomes more or less voluntary (Wimelius & Engberg, 2015).

This system is also, thus far, primarily government-agency based. Although there is a growing understanding that certain private companies and voluntary organizations need to be involved, it remains challenging to determine which companies and voluntary organizations to invite, and whether they should be included at all levels (which is resource intensive). Coordination in the Swedish Crisis Management System has been researched extensively, including challenges related to civil-military collaboration (Hedlund & Alvinius, 2024), public-private collaboration (Uhnoo & Persson, 2022), the inclusion of volunteers (Johansson et al., 2018) and the emergence and institutionalization of new coordination solutions (Frykmer & Becker, 2024).

RESULTS

Brief Descriptions of the Three Cases

Case 1 Grounding of a ferry causing oils spill - A passenger ferry ran aground twice outside the Swedish coast and became stranded after the second grounding. All passengers were safely evacuated, but the grounding caused a significant oil spill, affecting sensitive marine ecosystems and coastal areas and required a large-scale environmental rescue operation. To some extent there were two stages with different actors involved. There were the sea rescue efforts and taking care of the oil spill at sea that involved mainly national actors, and there were the clean-up efforts along the coastline that local municipalities and rescue services were responsible for. The shift between different actors and responsibilities during the crisis created confusion. The rescue phase was over relatively soon, but oil spill containment and clean-up continued for a long time. Even if there were unclear legal responsibilities especially between state and municipal actors, the response was in general considered successful.

Case 2 Flooding in two municipalities - Reoccurring high-water flows in a river caused flooding that affected two municipalities. During the turn of the year from 2020 to 2021, the high water flows reached beyond critical levels. The flooding was caused by increased precipitation and mild weather, which led to rising water levels in the passing river. The rising water levels affected the two municipalities, causing infrastructure damage, flooding in some areas and stress on critical services like the wastewater treatment plant and the crematorium. A joint crisis management team was formed between the municipalities and digital coordination meetings were held due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The newly built flood protection system in one of the municipalities was activated for the first time, which helped to prevent significant flooding in one of the municipalities. Challenges that were experienced were some delays in response due to uncertain forecasts, staffing difficulties due to holiday periods and difficulties in determining which stakeholders should be involved in decision-making at different stages, but generally the response was considered successful.

Case 3 Forest fire - In the summer of 2018, several forest fires raged in Sweden, causing a severe strain on rescue services on a national level. As the fires occurred during the vacation period, resource provision and allocation were additionally challenged due to various agencies being understaffed. One of the fires occurred in a firing ground and grew into a forest fire. Rescue services operated under severe resource constrains due to multiple fires occurring simultaneously requiring national coordination of resources and reinforcement from the European Union. In this specific fire, fire-fighting was additionally challenging due to unexploded ammunition in the ground. This caused the need for an unconventional approach for the rescue service who needed to tackle the fire from a distance. Furthermore, they needed access to resources they normally not needed in rescue services operations. Due to the specific circumstances, the operation needed unconventional thinking and decided to staff the Crisis Management Staff with diverse competence instead of as customary with rescue service competence only.

In the following section the three cases are described through the lenses of structural and entitative organizationality.

Membership

In the ferry grounding, the county administrative board as responsible for coordination had a large influence on which actors that were to be included. Members were included from a list of core actors and then additional members were included when the need was identified: "We are almost always the ones who convene the meetings […] If it goes wrong, someone will have to shout and say that I want to be involved. It also happens that we make

decisions, invite people and then realize afterwards. Shit, we missed an actor or they should have been involved or they want to be involved" (MB County administrative board).

In the ferry grounding, there were almost three levels of "membership": a core group attending all meetings, a more peripheral group attending parts of them and actors joining only when they had specific interests. It can be viewed as degrees of membership, informally shaped by the county administrative board's authority.

Membership in the flooding case stands out as it was a reoccurring event. Due to their experience of high water flows they had established precautionary measures. Hence, they had a preunderstanding of what they would need in terms of resources and competences in case of a flooding and had established relationships with actors that they needed to engage in collaboration with when the situation occurred. "We try to work proactively with floods outside of floods. And involve these people." (Security coordinator municipal collaboration)

In the forest fire case, the operation was initially managed as any other forest fire with the local rescue service as primary actor. However, as this specific fire turned out to be unusually complex, rescue services realized that they themselves lacked the capacity and the resources necessary. As resource provision was nationally strained, accessible competence needed to be identified and mobilized by drawing on individual's networks. As a result, individuals joined the operation in an ad hoc-manner, sometimes straight from their vacation spot with no more information but a name on the person they should approach on the scene. In some cases, individuals with critical competencies showed up independently;

> Some signed up voluntarily. For example, someone, he was working on GIS, that is, geographic information systems and maps. We had huge problems with maps. I had said it in an interview, so he just signed up outside the station. (Rescue service leader)

At other times, competence not conventionally part of a crisis management team was requested. For example, the Swedish Weather Forecast Agency was asked to join the team and eventually sent a meteorologist to the site; their competence in anticipating and explaining weather effects on fire development was important for informed decisions. Since standard procedures of which actors were to be involved were not sufficient for dealing with this particular event, members had to be engaged due to what the situation demanded.

> I think that a lot of what we shaped that was after the event itself, not the other way around. We didn't take a management team and try to push in so that it would fit, but the other way around. We built something that fit against what we had. (Rescue service leader)

Hierarchy/Authority

The membership dynamics previously mentioned in the ferry grounding case also manifested the county administrative board's authority. It convened meetings based less on formal decision power than on perceived legitimacy and trust:

> We feel both the trust of the actors and that we ourselves can take the lead in our county. (MB County administrative board)

Trust built through collaboration enabled the County administrative board to convene meetings and, indirectly, to shape membership.

In the flooding case, actors acknowledged that they lacked decision-making authority over one another:

> We would never be able to tell [electricity company] that you have to. (Security coordinator municipal collaboration).

Because all actors shared an interest in preventing flooding, this was rarely problematic, except when different courses of action risked damaging different properties.

The hierarchy in the forest fire case was centralized to a crisis management team that gradually shrunk to eventually involve four individuals. To achieve continuity, the same rescue service leader kept the role during the entire operation.

Rules

Rules, membership and authority were closely connected in the ferry grounding case. A standing rule that the county administrative board convened the meetings gave it agenda-setting authority and implicitly shaped membership. The flooding case was similar and in both cases rules were largely informal.

In comparison with the other cases, a forest fire is a fairly common event, with established rules and procedures. With this particular forest fire, however, normal rules proved inapplicable. Since the unexploded ammunition in the ground hindered rescue services from approaching the fire, the common aim of extinguishing the fire was unachievable. Instead, rescue services had to focus on preventing the fire to spread and eventually burn itself out. Moreover, the common capacity of regional and national agencies supporting the local operation with resources and coordination if needed was severely weakened due to the multiple fires occurring during summer vacation. Hence, the crisis management team had to adapt to the circumstances and formulate situation specific rules of how to tackle the event.

Monitoring

Across the cases, monitoring was primarily informal, enacted through continuous interaction and shared situational awareness. It did not focus on compliance to rules, but rather to monitoring an evolving situation, which is something different.

In the forest fire, however, there were both formal and informal monitoring: the rescue leader communicated daily goals to illustrate progress and enable follow-up and thereby monitoring, while additional team members acted as "trusted critics". Yet, also in this case, the rules were rather enacted in interaction, than that compliance to rules were monitored.

In all three cases, monitoring did not focus on compliance to rules. It was focused on "something" rather than "someone": actors jointly monitored the evolving situation and the process itself, more than compliance with pre-decided rules.

Sanctions

Sanctions were difficult to identify in the cases. In the flooding case, the absence of sanctions was explained through relationship investments:

> We have never been in a situation when an actor does not do as we have agreed. (IA Municipal collaboration)
>
> Maybe it's because we have good relationships that we value. We have all invested a lot in these relationships, and no one wants to risk losing that. (IA Municipal collaboration)

Good relationships appeared to prevent "bad behavior", making the lack of sanctions less problematic; the ferry grounding case was described similarly.

As for positive sanctions, the forest fire event was characterized by individuals earning influential roles in tackling the crisis due to their competence and ability to embrace an emerging culture of acknowledging different perspectives and trial and error.

> I had never met either "person C" or "person D". But now we know each other very well, you could say. But that grew and I don't really know how it happened that it was them. But. They must have distinguished themselves in some way and they became my closest friends from day one to today. (Rescue service leader)

Systems of Decision-making

In the flooding case, actors calibrated decisions to other actors' perspectives rather than acting solely on jurisdictional decision rights:

> I think we have reached far in the collaboration. I mean there is rather strong decision rights for some positions based on jurisdiction, but I would say that all actors have an ability to perspective-taking. So, in practice, although strong decision rights, decisions are not made in isolation, but in

> considering effects for other actors adhering mainly to other perspectives. (Security coordinator Municipal collaboration)

In the forest fire, decision-making was centered on the rescue service leader, supported by a small core crisis management team. As complexity demanded multiple perspectives, members functioned as "trusted critics" who developed the reasoning through open questions:

> That group got a little smaller over time and in the end, we were, I would say, four people who were in the absolute inner circle. Sometimes ideas came up that we could bounce around between each other, but most of the time I had already decided on it. But I just wanted to make sure my thoughts weren't wrong. Yes, I use them a bit as the devil's advocate. (Rescue service leader)

Actorhood

The county administrative board's convening role in the ferry grounding and other crises suggested that the network itself took on actorhood, organizing and mobilizing efforts rather than waiting for external directives.

> We are more inclined to act than not to act. Time-wise, it doesn't take very long. It's usually half an hour to an hour, depending on the nature of the issue. (MB County administrative board)

In the flooding case, the collaboration similarly took on actorhood itself rather than representing different actors (organizations):

> They want to take measures to lower the water level. And they have their own firm opinion about how to do this in the best way. Then you have [national agency] which has its own firm opinion about what not to do […] there will be some conflicts during this kind of handling anyway […] but in the end we must take action. (Security coordinator municipal collaboration).

In the forest fire, actorhood was centralized to the core crisis management team with the rescue service leader in the foreground. They were actively taking actorhood and extended their mission outside of normal procedure taking on task normally performed by regional or national actors simply because that was what the situation required.

Collective Identity through Speech Acts

There are speech acts that can be seen as identity claims, where the actors talk about the collaboration as an entity in itself, such as:

> We tend to agree that we have a very good collaboration climate. It is often written by different actors in evaluations, but people also tend to say it. (MB County administrative board)

Such speech acts were not only identity claims but also reflected actorhood: when actors describe a shared working culture, they position themselves as part of a unified whole that can act.

In the two municipalities repeatedly affected by high water flows, a collective identity had become established among the most involved actors, and efforts were made to extend it to the local community:

> We try to do that all the time by having films on the website that talk about the floods. That there are memorials all over [town], about how high the water was. Like that. You have to tell the story […] It is partly about just accepting that we may have to live with the floods (IA Municipal collaboration)

In the forest fire, collective identity formed around an emerging culture of openness towards other perspectives and trial and error:

> I also tell the staff in every meeting to raise whatever comes to mind. No question is too stupid to ask […] I still want an atmosphere of openness and high ceilings. If you have an idea, just put it out there. It could be the solution to the whole case. (Rescue service leader)

DISCUSSION

In our analysis we have showcased how organizationality (Ahrne et al., 2016; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) can be used to study multi-actor crisis management. Structural organizationality was relatively weak across the cases, but not absent. Rather, it reflected the overarching design of the Swedish crisis management system with the principles of responsibility, proximity and parity, which assign public actors facilitation roles. It created a baseline structure in which public actors often shaped **membership** by convening meetings, thereby indirectly establishing **hierarchy** and certain procedural **rules**. Even when new actors offering expertise entered in adhoc manner, their inclusion remained dependent on acceptance by the coordinating public actor. This suggests that crisis collaboration is not purely emergent, but embedded in pre-existing arrangements that provide a latent structural foundation for organizing, even when formal hierarchy remains weak.

In table 1, we present our interpretation of the different elements of structural organizationality and the different aspects of entitative organizationality for the different cases.

Table 1: Elements and aspects of organizationality in the different cases

	Ferry grounding	**Flooding**	**Forest fire**
Membership	Core/peripheral	Established core	Emerging
Hierarchy	Trust	Trust	Leader-lead
Rules	Informal	Informal	Reformulated
Monitoring	Adaptive	Early warnings	Progress
Sanction	None/social	None/social	Influence
Syst dec making	Iterative	Calibrating	Leadership team
Actorhood	Collaborate	Collaborate	Leader
Collective identity	Collaborate	Commitment	Visual/metaphor

A first defining moment is when actors recognize a potential crisis and begin to organize a collaborative response. ***Membership*** (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) in the collaborative work can materialize in different ways. First, an actor may be the primarily affected or responsible actor to handle the incident (like the Rescue services for the forest fire and the Coast guard for the oil spill in the ferry grounding), and as a consequence become heavily involved operationally and medially. Next, depending on whether the incident affects the national, the regional or the local level; the appointed agencies with geographical area responsibility (the Swedish Civil Contingency Agency, the county or the municipality), can invite to regular collaboration-conferences. Participants in these collaboration-conference are a given core group of crisis management responsible agencies (who might even have regular weekly conferences if no incidents are handled), as well as additional actors who have a stake in the ongoing incident. This is illustrated most clearly in the ferry grounding case, where the collaboration-conference had been gathered several times and there was a core, but they had not worked with this type of crisis before. In the flooding case, there was an even more established core, since they had managed this type of crises before. In the forest fire, rescue services had a very clear role, but since this was not a "normal" fire, membership became more emerging after identifying certain needs.

Challenges may arise when a first actor does not step into their role or if all involved actors are not convinced that the incident is a crisis (cf. Van Laere, 2013). They may not join the collaborative crisis management effort (as they do not perceive the incident as a crisis), or drop out after a while. Also, the additional crisis management collaboration efforts, may compete with the existing interaction structures. As a multi-organizational crisis management collaboration structure may be necessary to speed up decision making and manage resource shortages, the coexistence of the regular interaction-fora, and the additional crisis management collaboration meetings, may cause some confusion on where to discuss what matters. Inter-organizational crisis collaboration may even arise in parallel at the operational level. Here, actors may be involved in the same way, based on their responsibility and/or affectedness, or as they are invited to collaboration on-site as part of existing collaboration practices or relations. Additionally, new actors may approach and offer themselves as having relevant expertise or resources (i.e., volunteers in the forest fire).

With regard to ***hierarchy***, the collaboration conferences are at one hand voluntarily, while at the other hand there is by law an obligation to collaborate with all actors involved. From the established crisis management procedures, it is clear that the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (national level), the county (regional level) and the municipality (local level) are governing the meetings. As such, they can influence who to invite, what is presented in the situation picture, what is put on the agenda with regard to common challenges to discuss, and have in that way more power than the other participants through their appointed role as meeting coordinator, although they do not have any formal hierarchical power over the others. Hence, the power they through their leading role execute,

is to a large part entitative, they create structured decision-making processes which is accepted by the others. Their structural organizationality (Coulombel & Berkowitz, 2024) through their chairman role and agenda setting (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) creates opportunity, but it is not a very strong hierarchical position. In the ferry grounding and flooding cases, this is compensated by strong trust between members that either work frequently together with crises (ferry grounding case) or even have experiences of working together with this type of crisis (flooding case). Since the other actors are trusting the actor that takes the lead, it gives an authority that goes beyond the formal position.

On the operational level, another actor may, due to their formal role at the scene have hierarchical leadership power. For instance, the rescue services leader could, given the mandate when fighting a fire, give command to other organizations to release resources to them. This was the case in the forest fire, which meant that hierarchy was strongly related to one leader (the rescue service leader) in comparison with the other cases. However, in comparison with "a normal forest fire", the rescue service leader had to involve many other actors beyond firefighting. Here, it also became clear that structural organizationality (Coulombel & Berkowitz, 2024) creates conditions (i.e., the rescue services have most power in the forest fire case), but that the actually realized entitative organizationality (Coulombel & Berkowitz, 2024) may differ when for example the rescue services commander engages other actors and governs from a holistic approach.

When considering the other elements of structural organizationality—**rules**, **monitoring**, and **sanctions** (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011)—these factors do not appear as the theory suggest. Yet, monitoring did take place, though not as a means of ensuring compliance with rules, but rather as a way of observing and assessing the crisis in various ways. In the ferry grounding case, there was an adaptive monitoring, where the situation was continuously evaluated and the process was adjusted. In that way, it was reactive towards how the crisis progressed. Adaptive monitoring is identified by Wollebæk and Hansen (2025) in collaborative crisis management as an alternative to monitoring as enforcing rigid rules, since it allows dynamically updating strategies as conditions change. We highlight that beyond being a good strategy in collaborative crisis management, adaptive monitoring also contributes to organizationality, but it does not mean monitoring as an element of structural organizationality, rather it supports entitative organizationality. Similarly, in the flooding case, monitoring was related to situational awareness through early warning systems. This resembles with research on crisis networks suggests that decentralized monitoring often enhances situational awareness and response speed (Ansell et al., 2010; Nohrstedt et al., 2018), but our case show how it also enhances organizationality. Neither in the forest fire was monitoring performed in relation to compliance to rules, but to the situation. Monitoring was highly related to the progress in the fire fighting.

Despite the lack of rules and the lack of monitoring as compliance to rules and the almost total absence of sanctions, all cases functioned effectively. One possible explanation is the presence of trusting relationships within the collaboration, which developed in relation to hierarchy. Mayer et al. (1995) describe organizational trust as being based on three key components: competence, benevolence and integrity. While competence can be understood as an instrumental aspect of trust, benevolence and integrity are more relational and personal in nature. In the forest fire case, membership was largely emergent, evolving in response to newly identified needs. Since there were no pre-existing relationships among actors, trust could not be built on prior experiences of benevolence or integrity. However, competence played a crucial role, as actors were included based on the perception that they possessed the necessary expertise. Trust in this context was thus competence-based. In contrast, in the ferry grounding and forest fire cases, pre-existing relationships contributed to trust among actors. In these instances, rules were largely informal, and there was no perceived need for monitoring or sanctions. Instead, social control mechanisms emerged, where the value placed on relationships discouraged actors from violating agreements. Consequently, trust and interpersonal relationships replaced formal regulatory structures, reinforcing collaboration.

There are similarities in all the cases regarding structural organizationality. Although membership and hierarchy in different ways were elements that the crisis management collaborations had access or gained access to, rules, monitoring and sanctions were largely missing as elements. The explanation can, to some extent, be attributed to the Swedish crisis management structure, which entirely lacks a centralized command hierarchy (Wimelius & Engberg, 2015). Instead, each actor is required—and obliged—to identify their role and collaborate based on their respective areas of expertise.

Since the Swedish crisis management system itself provides few or weak elements of structural organizationality, it becomes even more important to create entitative organizationality to enable action in the absence of strong structural conditions. The example we have already described, where authority is enabled through trust, is itself an instance of entitative organizationality. In all three cases, it is evident that an entitative organizationality either

already exists before the crisis or develops during it.

For example, the collaboration conference meetings in the ferry grounding and the flooding mostly evolve entitatively. Although the chairman role gives some precondition from a structural perspective to enact organizationality, formally there is no possibility for the coordinating chairman to actually enforce anything. This is no problem as long as the collaborative climate is constructive and all actors work for the larger whole rather than for their own interests only. This means that the **decision-making system is interconnected** and is important for an entitative organizationality However, when other actors experience that one of the main actors is not capable of joining the collaboration, then the absence of structural organizationality in form om rules, monitoring and sanctions, becomes problematic. The collaboration slowly derails while no one has formal power to fiercely restore direction and alignment.

In our study, all cases were examples of **interconnected systems of decision-making**. In the ferry grounding and flooding cases, iterative and calibrating decision-making ensured coordinated action. Iterative and calibrating are approaches with great similarities, but the iterative is more "searching" with less information, while calibrating is more fine-tuning. The forest fire case had a leader-driven but consultative approach, incorporating diverse expertise.

When it comes to **actorhood** (King et al., 2010), the crisis management collaboration formed some sort of actorhood in all cases. In the ferry grounding and flooding cases, actorhood emerged through the collaboration, where the collaboration could be seen as an actor and not many different actors. The forest fire case centralized actorhood under the rescue service leader, ensuring clear decision-making, but also involving others.

The highest order of entitative organizationality is when the entity develop a **collective identity**, which most often is achieved through speech acts making identity claims (Bartel & Dutton, 2014). In all cases, there were signs of collective identities. The ferry grounding and flooding cases fostered a collective identity through the collaboration itself, built on trust, shared experiences and the recognition of the collaboration as a distinct entity with shared attributes. The forest fire case developed a crisis-driven identity, emphasizing adaptability and expertise, but also acted visually and using metaphors to describe their identity.

The cases highlight that successful crisis response depends on entitative organizationality, particularly in a crisis management system as the Swedish that lacks clear hierarchies and command structures (cf. Wimelius & Engberg, 2015). Effective responses emerge through interconnected decision-making, collective actorhood and a shared identity. Strengthening entitative organizationality is thus crucial for managing multi-actor crises responses.

CONCLUSION

The study contributes to research on multi-actor crisis management by analyzing how the concept of organizationality can be applied to better understand crises preparedness and response. We did this by analyzing how diverse actors worked together in crisis without the full structure of a formal organization. They balanced the need for sufficient organizing to ensure effective crisis response while maintaining the flexibility required for engaging a diverse range of actors.

Whereas traditional crisis management research relies on concepts such as temporary organizations to describe the emergent character of crisis management, our study shows that there are both formal and informal structures that underpins and create some sort of order in the seemingly emergent organizing. We can better understand this seemingly emergent orders when directing focus on structural and entitative organizationality, since they show how different elements can make the collaborative crisis response achieve some level of "organization-ness" without being a full organization, which enable creating a collective identity and actorhood making the collaboration capable of coordinated actions.

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