Connecting the Army Organization: The Command Team and the Command Senior Enlisted Leader

Connecting the Army Organization: The Command Team and the Command Senior Enlisted Leader

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PhD Dissertation

Politica

ISBN: 978-87-7335-345-5

Cover: Svend Siune
Print: Fællestrykkeriet, Aarhus University
Layout: Annette Bruun Andersen

Submitted April 30, 2025
The public defense takes place June 24, 2025
Published June 2025

Forlaget Politica
c/o Department of Political Science
Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University
Bartholins Allé 7
DK-8000 Aarhus C
Denmark

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Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to everyone who made this project possible.

First and foremost, I thank my supervisors, Mads Leth Jacobsen and Morten Brænder from Aarhus University and Anne Roelsgaard Obling from the Defense College. Mads, I have appreciated your presence as a supervisor, your generosity with time, your willingness to engage with my ideas, your timely status requests, and your thorough feedback on my work. Morten, thank you for the inspiring discussions and insightful critiques that have shaped my work. Anne, our supervisor-supervisee relationship has now spanned my bachelor's thesis, master's thesis, and PhD. Thank you for being available for both ad hoc and planned sparring sessions, for assisting in finding concrete solutions to problems and roadblocks, for helping me navigate the intricacies of academia, for detailed feedback on my work, and for your energetic company at seminars and conferences.

I extend my sincere thanks to Commander Wilhelm Holsting, Head of Department at the Danish Defense College, for encouraging me to pursue this PhD – a journey that began with a conversation at a restaurant in Tel Aviv during the Mission Command Conference. Your unwavering support, early recognition of the need for research in this field, and efforts in enabling the project have been instrumental. I am also grateful to Professor Lotte Bøgh Andersen, Head of King Frederik's Center for Public Leadership, for playing a crucial role in making this project a reality and for securing external funding.

I also want to thank my colleagues Anders Klitmøller, officemate Karina Mayland, and Mia Hartman for countless discussions on military leadership, valuable feedback on my work, and for making the department such a stimulating and fun environment. Across the department, it is a privilege to have access to colleagues with such interest and expertise in military leadership.

Thank you to the leadership instructor team at the Army Academy for all the discussions on military leadership and teaching, and for your excellent sense of humor. Equally, thank you to the hundreds of Army Cadets I have had the privilege to teach and for your thoughtful perspectives on leading soldiers. To everyone at King Frederik's Center for Public Leadership, thank you for receiving me so warmly and for the constructive, inspiring paper meetings.

This project would not have been possible without the continuous interest and commitment of the Danish Army. I am deeply grateful to former Sergeant Major of the Army Henning Bæk for his unwavering support for and interest in the project. I also extend my sincere thanks to former Army Commander

Major General Gunnar Arpe without whose support the fieldwork would not have been possible.

Special thanks to the battalion leadership of the NATO Forward Presence in Latvia for taking a chance and letting an ethnographer observe your command practices unrestrictedly for a month. Thank you for the many hours in the command tent, for including me in the staff's "Sunday Group Sport," and for the social visits to Riga. I am particularly grateful to the S2/S3 team for integrating me warmly into their (tent) home away from home. I am especially indebted to the more than fifty interview participants who, from offices in various garrisons around the country, a tent in Latvia, and video connections for those deployed elsewhere, enthusiastically explained their command practices to me for up to two hours. Their passion for the subject and their willingness to continue interviews until all themes were illuminated indicated the importance of the research and made the research goals meaningful to pursue.

From across the services, I extend my thanks to Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kristian Venø and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Morten Thor Christensen for inviting me to present preliminary findings to their commands. This allowed me to assess their applicability beyond the Army. I also greatly appreciate the various command sergeant majors who invited me to present to their senior NCOs and provided opportunities to discuss ideas and findings with them.

I wish to thank Annette Bruun Andersen (IFSK) and Kate Thulin for their expert editorial feedback and flexible support during the editing process.

Abroad, I want to thank my colleagues at the Canadian Defense Academy, David Last and Eric Bégin, for their interest in my work, enriching discussions, and tireless efforts to establish a science of NCOs. I am grateful to Karl Ydén for his insightful feedback and discussions on the role of NCOs and to the two former Supreme Allied Commanders Europe and strategic-level CSELs in NATO and the US who graciously gave their accounts of command teams' institutional evolution on the international scene.

Finally, and most importantly, I am deeply grateful to my family – Mom, Dad, Ditte, and Mikkel – for always supporting me, believing in me, and helping with the logistical challenges of the writing process. Ene, thank you for your patience, for being the sweetest and funniest company, and for reminding me of all the wonderful things in life beyond writing a PhD. I am so proud of you.

Rasmus Marquard Andresen
Copenhagen, April 2025

Preface

My PhD dissertation, *Connecting the Army Organization: The Command Team and the Command Senior Enlisted Leader*, consists of three articles and this summary report. It was written at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University in collaboration with the Danish Defense College from September 2021 to April 2025. The summary report situates the articles within the literature, elaborates on the methodological considerations, and summarizes the main findings of the dissertation across the three papers. Readers are referred to the three articles for further details on literature, theoretical frameworks, methods, analysis, and findings.

Article A:
"Authority Without Formality: The Authorization of the Command Senior Enlisted Leader." Submitted to *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*.

Article B:
"The Dual Nature of Command: Exploring Individual and Collective Dimensions in Command Teams." Submitted to *Defense Studies*.

Article C:
"Bridging Formal and Informal Army Organization: The Role of Command Teams in the Danish Army." Submitted to *Armed Forces and Society*.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine War, commentators repeatedly pointed to Russia's lack of a professional and empowered NCO corps as a factor in its battlefield inefficiency (see, for example, Barany, 2023; Wasielewski, 2023).[1] This lack of a NATO-similar NCO corps is believed to contribute to poor unit cohesion, weak small-unit initiative, and systemic discipline problems. In contrast, after Russia's first aggression into Ukrainian territory in 2014, Ukraine sought Western mentoring in reforming its Soviet-inherited, top-heavy, centralized command and control system by, in part, developing a professional and empowered NCO corps (Garamone, 2023; Langum, 2024). This capability is seen as a key factor in the Ukrainian Army's ability to stop a numerically far superior aggressor. Broadly, professional "noncoms" are seen as essential in industrial warfare and later developments as they bridge officers' plans with enlisted personnel's execution and enable initiative by acting with informed initiative within commanders' intent. Thereby, NCOs play a decisive role in enabling mission command philosophy (Shamir, 2011; US Army, 2019; M. L. Van Creveld, 1987) that works by decentralizing execution to the lowest levels of the chain of command[2] (Barany, 2023; Garamone, 2023; Wasielewski, 2023).

The weight that such analyses place on NCOs regarding armies' combat effectiveness reflects NATO's belief in a differentiated system (Dandeker & Yden, 2022): a system with officers and NCOs as two complementary leader categories whose differing expertise, functions, and organizational interfaces serve as the foundation for meeting the many-faceted demands on military leadership. This belief in a differentiated system is reflected in NATO militaries' consistent emphasis on NCOs as the backbone of military leadership (Dandeker & Yden, 2022; Edwards et al., 2014; Hogan et al., 2003; NATO, 2020, 2023). At the same time, this symbolic recognition of NCOs in military leadership, military sociology, and leadership studies has translated into limited attention to the actual roles of NCOs in military leadership (Dandeker & Yden,

[1] Russia has recently attempted to develop a more professional NCO corps, but the very idea of autonomy, decentralized decision-making, and the empowerment of low-level leaders contradicts the autocratic logic of top-down control and low trust, making these efforts fruitless (Barany, 2023; Wasielewski, 2023).

[2] The idea of professionalizing NCOs and pushing initiative and decision-making down to the NCO level was first seen in the Wehrmacht and was, together with other elements of *Auftragstaktik*, seen as a key factor in Wehrmacht's superior tactical efficiency (M. van Creveld, 2007; Wilson, 2000).

2022), especially at the organizational and strategic levels, beyond their well-established duties as tactical executioners and intermediaries between officers and enlisted personnel (Huntington, 1957; Siebold, 2001; Stouffer et al., 1949a).

Infobox 1: The Military Profession

Commissioned Officers (OF1–OF10): Officers command units from the platoon level (approximately 30 soldiers) upward. Commissions signify a granted command authority (Swain & Pierce, 2017). Officers receive theory-based professional military education at academies such as West Point (US Army) or Sandhurst (UK Army). Ranks range from *Second Lieutenant* to *General*.

Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) / Enlisted Leaders (OR4–OR9): Enlisted personnel authorized to command troops, typically squad (approximately 30 soldiers) and section. NCOs undergo more practical, professional development. Ranks include *Corporal* through *Chief Warrant Officer* or *Command Sergeant Major*. Senior NCOs in command teams are called Command Senior Enlisted Leaders (NATO terminology) and Command Sergeant Majors (US terminology).

Enlisted Personnel (OR1–OR3): Enlisted specialist soldiers without formal command responsibilities.

Professional Boundaries: Huntington (1957) defined the military profession as consisting of the officer corps, viewing other categories as military trades. Today the boundaries of the profession are broadened to include other personnel (NATO 2013; Okros 2012; see Berndtsson 2021 and Høiback 2021 for specific discussions on the Swedish and Norwegian military professions).

The urgent need to better understand NCOs' evolving roles in military leadership is recognized elsewhere. In May 2025, the Canadian Military and NATO's Defense Education Enhancement Programme is co-hosting a conference with the aim of establishing a "structured, research-based Science of NCOs, addressing key gaps" (Bégin, 2025). The conference begins with the assertion that despite NCOs' historically critical role of leading on the frontlines, ensuring mission success, and shaping military culture through direct engagement with troops, NCOs' role has remained understudied, and "military research and professional military education [have] largely centered on officer development" (Bégin, 2025). Recent accounts support this bias in military sociology (Dandeker & Yden, 2022). Huntington's (1957) influential framing of the

officer corps as the singular military profession, as well as the early military profession literature developed for civil-military relations analysis, has affected this focus and led to omissions in both the literature and military self-understanding (Dandeker & Yden, 2022; Libel, 2019; Ydén, 2021).

Accelerated by current events and a world security order that is evolving by the week, Western militaries are facing drastic transformations, including rapid upscaling and technological advancements, evolving leadership structures, and increasing multinational interoperability. Clear professional models for NCOs will be essential to inform discussions on how to develop Western nations' NCO corps for these developments (Bégin, 2025).

The increasing use of the command team structure is one transformation that makes these discussions especially important. Command teams are formalized leadership dyads between a commander (CDR) and a CSEL (NATO, 2017; Okros, 2012). These formal dyads institutionalize an officer-NCO partnership in charge of units at all hierarchical levels, which reflects broader trends in integrating NCOs' higher-level leadership and advisor roles (NATO, 2015, 2017, 2020).

This dissertation addresses the overall research question: *How are command teams and the CSEL function enacted as leadership practices in the Danish Army?* Practices are here broadly understood as the processes, functions, and forms of authorization through which leadership is enacted, including both formal and informal dimensions of organizing, sensemaking, and decision-making. The Danish Army started implementing these concepts in 2018 (#38[3]). Command teams and the CSEL function bring senior CSELs to the core of unit command at every hierarchical level, and their organizational enactments are thus valuable sites of inquiry for addressing NCOs' under-researched organizational leadership functions. This project addresses the overall research question by exploring three related research questions, described below, on the functioning of command teams and the CSEL function.

Although command teams and CSELs have been employed for decades in major NATO countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, there has been no empirical study of how these concepts function in practice.[4] The concepts are mentioned in military policies, but the need for a systematic understanding of how they function in practice is evidenced by abstract descriptions in these policies that do not engage with or provide guidance on how to navigate the concept's inherent tensions (NATO, 2015, 2017, 2020), which I illustrate below.

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[3] Interview references are denoted by a '#' followed by their number in the dataset.

[4] Okros (2012) offers an insightful analysis of the inherent conceptual tensions.

The idea of a command dyad suggests a form of co-leadership (Denis et al., 2012; E. Gibeau et al., 2016; É. Gibeau et al., 2020), and the use of the term "team" is intriguing as it invites the question of how command can be shared in heavily formalized, hierarchical, commander-centered military organizations (Kark et al., 2016). After all, command authority and its accompanying legal accountability are given to individual commanders in command positions (NATO Standardization Office, 2020; Okros, 2012), and military command is often associated with individual heroism (Clausewitz, 2008; Grint, 2005; Kark et al., 2016; Keegan, 1987; A. King, 2019).

As mentioned, descriptions of command teams are characterized by doctrinal equivocation (NATO, 2017, 2020). On the one hand, they emphasize individual command authority and the hierarchical relationship between commanders and CSELs. On the other hand, ideas of collectivity are also expressed: "The command team shares the responsibility of leadership and the burden associated with command" (NATO, 2020, p. 14).

Existing policies are equally opaque about the sources of authority that underpin CSELs' leadership. CSELs occupy a seemingly paradoxical position: They are part of the top management dyad, yet they stand outside the chain of command. They are also described as operating from a "position of leadership and influence" (NATO, 2020, p. 14). However, it remains unspecified what it means to lead from a position of "leadership and influence" and how this form of authorization relates to the formal structure of authority, the chain of command.

Beyond its primary focus and inspired by the mix of individual and collective logics in policy descriptions of command teams, this dissertation also contributes to ongoing debates on individual vs. collective command. Recent literature debates whether military command has shifted from an individual endeavor to a collective phenomenon (Freedman, 2020, 2022; A. King, 2019, 2020, 2022; Klitmøller & Obling, 2021; Storr, 2022). Traditionally, command has been understood as extensive centralized authority vested in individual commanders to efficiently deploy combat power in complex and high-risk environments (Freedman, 2022; NATO Standardization Office, 2020; Okros, 2012; Storr, 2022). However, some argue that modern warfare's complexity has necessitated a shift toward "collective command," as seen in General McChrystal's "Team of Teams" approach (McChrystal, 2013, 2017; McChrystal et al., 2015), and mission management at divisional level where decision-making is distributed across professionalized communities (A. King, 2019, p. 18).

However, it remains contested whether and how command may have become increasingly collective since the start of the Global War on Terror era. The command team is the most basic organizational element that can function

according to individual and/or collective command. The mix of individual and collective logics in policy descriptions makes them a compelling and instructive empirical case for analyzing the interplay between these two modes of command.

Studies A through C

This dissertation addresses the above-described gap in military sociology, the project's main research question, and the ambiguities and conceptual tensions in NATO policy through three studies. The studies follow an inside-to-outside logic, beginning with an exploration of CSELs' authorization (Study A), progressing to investigate sensemaking and decision-making between CDRs and CSELs within command teams (Study B), and ending with a focus on how command teams bridge the formal and informal army organizations (Study C) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

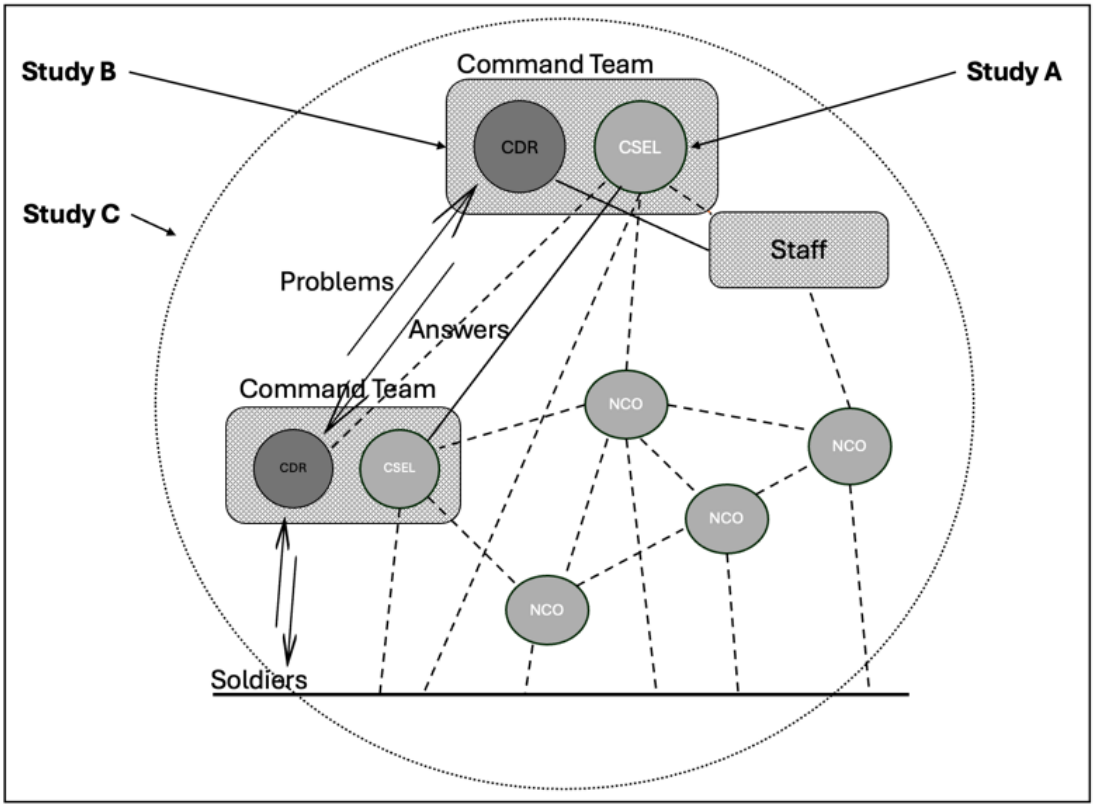


Figure 1 is adapted from Article C. Solid arrows represent the formal chain of command, while dotted lines indicate informal relationships, i.e., elements of the formal organization centered on the NCO corps.

Article A, titled "Authority Without Formality: The Authorization of the Command Senior Enlisted Leader," addresses the research question: *How are CSELs authorized in the Danish Army, and what are the implications for*

their leadership? The article uses the classic sociological concepts of formal and personal (charismatic) authority (Weber, 2019) and later refinements of these concepts (English, 2019; Joosse, 2014; Joullié et al., 2020) to analyze how CSELs are authorized through the combination of being construed as extensions of their commanders' authority and the personal authority they build with their unit's personnel through social contracts. This dual authorization enables CSELs to fulfill a leadership role based mainly on negotiated personal authority, which is different from and works in complement with the role of commanders. The locally negotiated nature of CSELs' authority makes the role complex to navigate, and the status of their leadership communication, i.e., whether their communication has the status of orders, can be ambiguous. However, for CSELs who manage to navigate this precarious role, it also enables access, influence, and advocacy complementary to commanders' roles.

Article B, titled "The Dual Nature of Command: Exploring Individual and Collective Dimensions in Command Teams," addresses the research question: *How do individual and collective command dimensions interact in the everyday practices and actions of the army's command teams?* The study primarily employs sensemaking theory (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) to analyze sensemaking and decision-making practices in command teams. The study finds that command teams largely function as sensemaking forums, where CDRs and CSELs construe an ongoing, workable level of shared certainty from the flux of activity in their units and environments, enabling coordinated action. This sensemaking is impactful as it frames issues and shapes both subsequent decision-making and the commander's intent. However, the collective processes in command teams are underpinned by an unequivocal shared understanding of individual command, and hence, sensemaking and decision-making are described as being the commander's individual undertakings. In this manner, collective processes are often portrayed as individualistic in practitioners' framings. Individual and collective elements are thus extensively intertwined in CDRs' and CSELs' co-leadership.

Article C, titled "Bridging Formal and Informal Army Organization: The Role of Command Teams in the Danish Army," addresses the research question: *How do command teams integrate formal and informal domains within the Danish Army organization?* The study proposes an integrative framework for understanding the relationship between formal and informal organization in military leadership based on command team practices. At all hierarchical levels, commanders engage the chain of command, while CSELs primarily engage the informal organization surrounding NCOs. The informal organization provides complementary upward and downward information channels, including interactions for making sense of formal communication,

interactions where collaborative, provisional problem-solving can occur, and interactions where critical discussions can take place. The chain of command provides decision authority, direction, formal accountability, and, when necessary, decision speed. Command teams function as bridges that enable the integration of insights from informal domains into formal decision-making spaces and the translation of formal communication into soldiers' everyday lives and tasks.

Guide to Readers

The rest of the dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter Two establishes the dissertation's foundation in pragmatist philosophy, examines the historically limited role of NCOs in military sociology, introduces the research questions guiding each of the three studies, and presents the theoretical frameworks mobilized to address them. Chapter Three transitions from methodology to methods and qualifies the data sources, describing the data analysis and how the field was approached, before detailing the interview study and the embedded field work. Reflexivity, ethics, and positionality are continuous themes consolidated in the final section. Chapter Four addresses the main research questions before presenting findings from Study A through C. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the prevailing metaphor of NCOs as "the backbone of the military," considers the findings' potential transferability to other armies, examines the dissertation's contribution to debates on collective command, reflects on the relative absence of professional power struggles in the data, and concludes with practical implications.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter outlines the dissertation's pragmatist foundation, its abductive approach to research puzzles, and the use of theories as tools for inquiry. Rather than constructing a unified framework, the chapter traces a theoretical throughline by showing how theories were selected for their ability to offer conceptual leverage on key research puzzles and support the abductive development of insights. This flexible approach enables a nuanced exploration of how specific aspects of command teams and the CSEL function are relationally enacted across the dissertation's papers. By selecting theoretical tools tailored to each research question, the dissertation offers conceptually grounded yet empirically sensitive insights into the military leadership practices in focus. The chapter begins by outlining the dissertation's pragmatist approach to scientific inquiry, then situates NCOs within the literature on military professionalism, and finally introduces and qualifies the theoretical frameworks employed to address research questions A–C.

Pragmatism, The Abductive Approach, and Theories as Tools

The dissertation draws on the philosophical position of American pragmatism in the Deweyan and Peircean traditions (Morgan, 2014; Peirce, 1878). This position has informed the formulation of the research questions, the data analyses, how theory is selected and employed, the assumed relationship between participants' stated perceptions and organizational practice, and the status of the produced knowledge.

In this perspective, the meaning of an event or phenomenon cannot be established in advance of experience (Morgan, 2014; Peirce, 1878). Beliefs and actions are linked in a continuous, iterative relationship; a problem is recognized, and existing beliefs are employed to consider the nature of the problem. After taking action, the outcomes of actions are reflected upon and fed back into how beliefs are updated. Inquiry, then, becomes a process of moving back and forth between beliefs and actions until some form of resolution is achieved (Morgan, 2014). The abductive approach, i.e., the approach that builds understanding through iterative engagement with empirical material and conceptual reflection (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), is the methodological extension of the pragmatist position.

As Morgan (2014) argues, pragmatism breaks with the conventional dualism between postpositivism and constructivism as it is applied to social research (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 2005). From the pragmatist standpoint, the idea

that the world exists independently of our understanding and the notion that it is created through our understanding are both seen as equally important aspects of the human experience. Our experiences are constrained by the nature of the world, and our understanding of the world is limited to our interpretations of experience. Ontological debates about the world "out there" versus our conceptual constructions of it are, from this perspective, two sides of the same experiential coin. While the pragmatist stance does not foreground ontological claims about socio-material reality, it does not preclude engagement with structural dimensions of military organization where relevant.

The project began with the overall research question: *How are command teams and the CSEL function enacted as leadership practices in the Danish Army?* and the policy ambiguities and conceptual tensions introduced above and elaborated below. The conceptual tensions and the practical ambiguity regarding how to navigate them organizationally pose both practical and analytical problems. They create an opportunity for inquiry and an abductive approach that moved between theoretical curiosity and empirical exploration.

I developed provisional research questions based on the conceptual tensions in policy and the practical ambiguities that arise in navigating them. These included the organizational authorization of CSELs, how they enact their leadership, and how they engage the "informal networks" referenced in policy documents. I also explored how conflicting messages of individuality and collectivity shaped command team practices and related to recent theoretical propositions about the emergence of collective command (A. King, 2019, 2020). The interview guide was thematically built from these provisional research questions.

The provisional research questions evolved into the final research questions through the dialogue between data and theory during the analytical process of coding the interviews and writing up the analysis. Rather than starting from a single framework, I brought in theory to address empirical puzzles and answer the research questions. Theory is treated and used as a set of tools for making sense of situated command team and CSEL practices, not as a representation of reality to be tested (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Each article, therefore, mobilizes a different theoretical framework suitable to its research question while maintaining an analytical throughline focused on the relational enactment of authority, command, and organizational integration within formal army structures.

As outlined above, pragmatism sees the world "out there" and our conceptual constructions of it as two sides of the same experiential coin. This relationship between beliefs and the external world informs the project's understanding of the relationship between the participants' statements in the interviews and the organizational practices and processes they describe and reflect

upon. In pragmatism, beliefs are not merely representations of reality but tools for people's actions. When the participants describe their practices, they are revealing what they rely on to act effectively within their roles, how they conceptualize their practice, and what they consider to be normal, effective, or problematic. This relationship between meaning and social behavior resembles that of constitutive causality from the interpretative tradition (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, p. 141).

While assuming a tight connection between beliefs and action, the interviews are not seen as direct representations of the army's command team practices. However, what participants believe and say are central elements of army practices (Loscher et al., 2019; Schatzki, 2012). Schatzki (2012) argues for an intricate relationship between language and practices where, on the one side, "language is an important clue as to which activities and practices exist" (p. 24), and on the other side, the risk of language being shaped by ideology or idealized narratives increases with more abstracted accounts of practices. My efforts to mitigate these limitations of interviews are described in the methods chapter. While I do not adopt a practice-theoretical framework, insights from practice theory (Schatzki, 2012) inform how I understand the interrelation between language, belief, and organizational behavior.

In the pragmatist tradition, knowledge is evaluated by its warranted assertibility; that is, whether a belief holds up under scrutiny and proves useful in guiding action (Dewey, 2008; Egholm, 2014; Morgan, 2014). Scientific claims, from this perspective, are verified by their capacity to withstand critical scrutiny, cohere with experience, and serve as reliable guides to action within specific contexts:

> Studies like the ones mentioned above can tell us valuable truths about the realities of work, organizations, and management, which [...] will enable those readers to cope more effectively than they otherwise might should they become practically involved in the settings covered in the studies (Watson, 2011, p. 207).

This orientation implies that the value of a finding lies in its ability to illuminate and make sense of how command teams and the CSEL function are enacted in the Danish Army. Consequently, the analyses are evaluated by how well they clarify empirical puzzles, resonate with practitioners' lived experiences, and support more informed reflection and leadership action in similar organizational settings.

Having outlined the dissertation's pragmatist foundation, the next section situates NCOs within the literature on military professionalism. This provides the broader conceptual context for examining command teams and the CSEL function.

Military Professionalism and the Limited Theorization of NCOs

The literature on military professionalism has long centered on the officer corps, portraying them as the predominant military professionals. Rooted in foundational works such as Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* (1957), this literature conceptualizes professionalism primarily in terms of formal authority and responsibility, intellectual capability, and strategic decision-making. Officers are framed as the custodians of military expertise (the management of violence), institutional values, and corporate identity, while enlisted personnel are relegated to execution and technical competence: "The enlisted personnel have neither the intellectual skills nor the professional responsibility of the officer. They are specialists in the application of violence not the management of violence. Their vocation is a trade not a profession" (Huntington, 1957, pp. 17–18). By using the concept of "enlisted personnel," Huntington conflates specialist soldiers without command responsibilities with NCOs, whose function is the training of soldiers (and junior officers) and the direct, first-line command of troops. This omission of NCOs' central role in command and leadership and shaping military culture contrasts with earlier perspectives. Kipling recognized NCOs' central role in army leadership in 1896: "But the backbone of the Army is the Non-commissioned Man!" (The Kipling Society, n.d.). (Stouffer et al., 1949b) extensive empirical work on the US WWII military portrayed NCOs' central role in morale, cohesion, and first-line leadership, but did not theorize the NCO category. Huntington's framing of officers as military professionals and enlisted personnel as practical executors has significantly shaped subsequent sociological inquiry and the self-understanding of military professionalism, though it does not remain unchallenged (Brænder, 2021; Dandeker & Yden, 2022; Ydén, 2021).

NCOs do not meet the classic definition of professionalism as a "high-status occupation whose members apply abstract knowledge to solve problems in a particular field of endeavor" (Burk, 2005, p. 41), which underpinned much of the foundational work on military professionalism. While the term has not been applied analytically to NCOs, their role shares key characteristics of a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969): it involves formal training and credentials, some autonomy in the application of expertise to leadership and decision-making, and a strong commitment to institutional values.[5] NCOs lack the degree of autonomy and societal recognition associated with the officer profession, but institutionally, they are often described as role models for soldierly conduct.

[5] "Corporateness," in Huntington's (1957) terminology.

In addition to the dominance of the classical understanding of professionalism, early literature on military professionalism focused primarily on civil-military relations, emphasizing the officer's juridical responsibility and outward-facing representation in relation to civilian control and democratic oversight (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960; Libel, 2020, p. 17). However, military leadership, inseparable from its organizational function and organizational life, calls for analysis beyond formal jurisdictional distinctions. Van Doorn (1965) first argued that military bureaucracy and officer professionalism are intrinsically linked, and that argument can easily be extended to NCOs. When the sociology of professions focuses on jurisdiction, it tends to foreground groups with formal control, i.e., the officer corps, "while leaving aside the question of what arrangements must be in place for a task to be accomplished" (Eyal, 2013, p. 864 in Libel, 2020). Such arrangements could be other professional groups, informal systems, and tacit capacities necessary to accomplish military tasks. NCOs' more practice-oriented expertise, cohesion work, and relational forms of leadership fall outside the classic definition of professionalism and thus risk being analytically sidelined.

Recent work (Berndtsson, 2021; Brænder, 2021; Dandeker & Yden, 2022; Ydén, 2021) opens space for a broader conceptualization of military professionalism, and Segal and Angelis (2009) address the conceptualization of senior NCOs directly. Working conceptually from Huntington's criteria of professionalism, expertise, responsibility, and corporateness, they argue that the roles, expertise, and institutional responsibilities of senior NCOs have evolved to such an extent that they warrant inclusion within the military profession. They leave open whether this constitutes membership in the same profession, a distinct profession, or a semi-profession within a broader community of military professionalism. Burk (2005), who addresses other boundaries of military professionalism, suggests the useful term multi-professionalism for better comprehending the amalgam of expertise that enables modern military capabilities.

This recent work allows for reconceptualizing military professionalism in ways that better capture the hybrid, often informal roles that NCOs play in military leadership. My dissertation builds on this reconceptualization, focusing on NCOs' leadership embeddedness in the social relations of the army organization. Across the papers, I explore how NCOs, especially in their institutionalized leadership role as CSELs and members of command teams, are authorized relationally, participate in the co-creation of command through their trust-based relationship with commanders, and support the bridging of informal domains with the chain of command.

This section has shown the limitations of traditional professionalism theory in capturing NCO leadership and the emerging space for reconceptuali-

zation. The dissertation contributes to filling this space by examining how CSEL leadership is enacted relationally across formal and informal domains.

With this broader theoretical positioning in place, the following three sections outline the theoretical frameworks underpinning each article. While each study employs a framework tailored to its research puzzle, they are connected by a shared interest in relational enactments of authority, command, and organizational integration.

The Authorization of CSELs

CSELs occupy a seemingly paradoxical position in that they are part of the top management dyad, i.e., the command team, yet they stand outside the chain of command (NATO, 2017; Okros, 2012). Command teams command units at every hierarchical level in the Danish Army. While commanders carry formal authority (NATO, 2017), CSELs are described as operating from a "position of leadership and influence" (NATO, 2020, p. 14). However, what it means to lead from a position of "leadership and influence" remains unspecified, including what mandate this implies and how this form of authorization relates to the chain of command. This is analytically significant in an environment deeply characterized by hierarchy and formally codified roles. The practitioner and policy literature suggests that senior NCOs often exert influence well beyond their formal positions within the chain of command or rank structure (Edwards et al., 2014; Gardner et al., 2023; Jones, 2018; Moyer, n.d.; NATO, 2019). However, CSELs' personal authority is often taken for granted, and, to my knowledge, no academic studies have examined how this supposedly extensive organizational authority is acquired, maintained, or potentially lost.

The definition of the concept thus introduces conceptual and practical ambiguity, creating potential tensions within the army organization. Inspired by this lack of understanding, Study A explores: *How are CSELs authorized in the Danish Army, and what are the implications for their leadership?*

The article employs Weber's classic concepts of formal (legal-rational) and personal (charismatic) authority (Weber, 2019). Authority is the subset of power that is legitimate in the perception of those subjected to it (Weber, 2019, p. 134). Formal authority in the army is structurally inferred and underpinned by enduring social structures such as the institutions of state, sovereignty, government, the legal system, and "an office" (du Gay & Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2023; Joullié et al., 2020; van Oosterhout, 2002). It grants the right to command, and expected obedience is based on the office held, not the characteristics of the individual officeholder.

In contrast, charismatic authority refers to the more local and transient attribution of authority through a group of followers who ascribe leadership qualities to an individual (Joosse, 2014; Joullié et al., 2020; Smith, 2013;

Weber, 2019). It is relational and negotiated in situ. This article uses Weber's insights on the social construction of charisma (Joosse, 2014; Smith, 2013) to explore the authorization of CSELs. These insights align with perspectives on how leader authority or personal authority emerges discursively and relationally as a co-constructed phenomenon (Joullié et al., 2020, p. 4). Personal authority is thus constituted by charisma and other attributed personal qualities that are valued in context (Alasuutari, 2018; English, 2019; Hannan, 2023) and manifest in social contracts between leaders and their followers (NATO, 2017).

Command Team Dynamics: Trust, Confidentiality, Sensemaking, and Decision-making

Study B extends the analytical focus to the relational dynamics within army command teams, exploring how relational processes of trust and confidentiality, combined with an individual understanding of command authority, enable shared sensemaking between CDRs and CSELs to occur. This focus enables the study to contribute to two bodies of literature: 1) the contested proposition of collective command in the twenty-first century, and 2) the role of NCOs in military leadership, with particular attention to the officer-NCO relationship in unit leadership.

Doctrinally, the command team concept establishes a "professional loyalty-based partnership" (NATO, 2017, p. A-2) between CDRs and CSELs. As NATO's definitions of command teams include both individual and collective elements, command teams constitute a promising site of inquiry for exploring how these dimensions interact. The ways in which team-based command, individual authority (NATO, 2017, 2020), and the shared "burden of command" (NATO, 2020, p. 14) interact remain underexplored and warrant further examination. The study thus addresses the research question: *How do individual and collective command dimensions interact in the everyday practices and actions of the army's command teams?*

Military command is traditionally and doctrinally understood as an individual phenomenon enacted through extensive authority vested in individual commanders and their execution of that authority (Freedman, 2020, 2022; Okros, 2012; Storr, 2022). However, scholars and practitioners have highlighted an evolution toward collective command in response to operational complexity in the twenty-first century (A. King, 2019, 2020; McChrystal, 2013; McChrystal et al., 2015; Zinni & Koltz, 2009). King (2019) found that mission management decisions at the divisional level were made in "dense, professionalized decision-making communities" (A. King, 2019, p. 18) and

coined the concept "collective command."[6] However, King's strong proposition of a dichotomic shift from twentieth-century individual command to twenty-first-century collective command has been met with broad opposition (Freedman, 2020; Klitmøller & Obling, 2021; Sjøgren, 2022; Storr, 2022).

To understand how command teams function against the background of these divergent analyses, two terms require careful consideration. *Sensemaking* is the social process through which actors continuously generate actionable meaning and order from organizational complexity (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). *Command* can be understood both as formal authority (Freedman, 2020, 2022; NATO Standardization Office, 2020; Okros, 2012) and decision-making (A. King, 2019, 2020). However, before any commander or command team makes decisions, they inevitably engage in sensemaking processes, ranging from formal analysis to informal immediate exchanges with peers, to make sense of the situation and possible courses of action (A. D. Brown et al., 2015; Freedman, 2022; A. King, 2022; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020; Weick et al., 2005). Indeed, the understanding that a decision is warranted is itself a product of sensemaking.

While sensemaking has often been described as retrospective (e.g., Weick et al., 2005), prospective sensemaking aims to make sense of emerging futures (Gattringer et al., 2021; Konlechner et al., 2019), making it central in decision-making and a core element of command (A. King, 2019, 2020). Sensemaking and organizing are further intrinsically linked, as sensemaking is directed at establishing a continuous, workable level of shared certainty from the flux of organizational activity (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 570; Weick, 1979, p.6).

Sensemaking at the *intersubjective level* is where person-to-person understandings evolve collectively in direct interaction. This is where CDRs and CSELs synthesize their understandings to create a *merged subject* (Weick, 1995, p. 71) that enables them to communicate the shared understanding to different audiences. The intersubjective sensemaking in command teams is affected by the extra-subjective level, where people operate according to taken-for-granted, broadly available institutional meanings (Weick, 1995, pp. 114-115). The prevailing reverence for commanders' supreme authority exemplifies impactful extra-subjective sensemaking that shapes practitioners' understanding and enactment of command team practices.

The analyses also draw on the relational concepts of trust and confidentiality (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2002; Carmeli et al., 2012; A. Edmondson, 1999; Reid & Karambayya, 2009, 2015; Selvaratnam et al., 2016), as the data

[6] There has emerged a consensus, with some difference in nuance, that commad is sub-divided into command, leadership, and management (Grint, 2005; King, 2019; Okros, 2012).

suggested they are central to understanding the enabling dynamics between CDRs and CSELs and critically distinguish the command team relationship from other leadership relations, such as CDRs' relationships with deputy commanders.

Bringing the Formal and Informal Army Organization

Study C turns to how command teams function as a bridging mechanism for integrating formal and informal domains within the Danish Army. The interest in how command teams may engage informal domains of the army organization was sparked by a passage in a NATO policy, which describes how senior NCOs engage informal information networks that supposedly cross and connect hierarchical formal structures:

> S/he will explore the importance and the utility of informal information sharing of the informal network of NCOs (the NCO support channel) that crosses and connects the traditional hierarchical command structures (NATO, 2015, p. 103).

The idea of the "NCO support channel" appears only once, and the policy offers no insight into how such networks function within highly formalized military structures and how they support, rather than challenge, established bureaucracy. NCOs' organizational influence beyond their limited formal authority has been noted in the literature. Jaffe (1984, p. 35) described them as a "brotherhood of experience" with significant influence through their NCO network, and both Jaffe (1984) and Kirke (2009) describe their ability to shortcut the chain of command through the network's contacts with commanders across hierarchical levels.

To explore this puzzle, understanding the interdependence between formal and informal army domains is central. Bernard (1968)[7] noted that "formal organizations, once established, in their turn also create informal organizations" (ibid., p. 123). Organizations thus function through the integration of formal structures, i.e., the bureaucracy, and the informal organization, i.e., the social systems (Okros, 2012, p. 19). The question of how such integration or bridging occurs in the army organization became more salient with the introduction of command teams in the Danish Army. While command teams are widely utilized across NATO armies, their enactment has never been studied. As command teams are composed of CDRs, who have the chain of command at their disposal, and CSELs, who may engage the described networks, the study employs the classic sociological concepts of formal and informal organization (Barnard, 1968; Hunter et al., 2020; Wang & Wang, 2018) to answer

[7] Originally published in 1932.

the research question: How do command teams integrate formal and informal domains within the Danish Army organization?

Formal organization is defined through codified structures of authority and control, most notably the chain of command, which is built on Weber's rational-legal principle (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2016; Jaffe, 1984; Wang & Wang, 2018; Weber, 2019). It includes 1) a system of hierarchically organized jurisdictional areas, i.e., command position, defining superordination and subordination along with clear tasks and responsibilities, 2) recruitment based on educational qualifications, 3) administration governed by formalized rules and written documentation, and 4) impersonal authority derived from a legal-rational mandate delegated through the chain of command (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2016; Weber, 2019, pp. 344-346). Codifications specify how elements of the army organization achieve coordination and control (Barnard, 1968; W. Brown, 1965; Wu et al., 2021). The rational-legal principle is intended to ensure the legitimate and rational management of the nation's military capabilities (Weber, 2019, p. 350). Central to understanding military leadership, communication in the chain of command is reserved for formal concerns (Jaffe, 1984; Kirke, 2009), and as an effect of hierarchical referral, problems are solved at higher hierarchical levels than they originate.

In contrast, informal organization emerges from interpersonal relations and is defined as "the aggregate of the personal contacts and interactions and the associated groupings" (Bernard, 1968, p. 115). Informal organizations are necessary for formal organizations' operation, supporting functions such as communication, mutual adjustment (Mintzberg, 1983), sensemaking, cohesion, and counterbalancing the alienating aspects of formal organizations (Barnard, 1968; Hunter et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Even in militaries' highly formalized structures, the codification of action is never complete and does not provide guidance for all organizational problems (Janowitz, 1959, p. 83; Moskos, 1970; Sarkesian, 1975 in Jaffe, 1984, p. 31), which is then handled informally.

To conceptualize the relationship between these domains, the study adopts a typology from Wu et al. (2021), distinguishing between informal organizations as supplementing, compensating for, or competing with formal structure. This framework allows for a nuanced analysis of how command teams engage the formal and informal army organization.

3. Methodology and Methods

This chapter builds on the pragmatist approach and methodology discussed in the theory chapter and outlines and reflects upon the research design and methods applied across the three studies. This includes the two types of field study conducted, data analysis, reflections on positionality, and the ethical and political dimensions of conducting an extensive field study.

Semi-structured, individual interviews with both members of command teams and individuals in key positions in proximity to command teams constitute the primary data source across all the articles. The interviews are complemented by embedded fieldwork with an infantry battalion deployed in NATO Forward Presence in Latvia. Although I lost access to my detailed field notes, relegating the embedded field study to a supportive role, I show how it nevertheless played an important role in informing interviews and shaping my interpretation and analytical lens.

In line with the pragmatist and interpretative traditions of treating reflexivity as an integral part of the research process, throughout this chapter, I reflect upon the relationship to the field, positionality, and ethics, and ultimately consolidate key reflexive themes in a dedicated section. Given the relational and co-constructed nature of knowledge in qualitative inquiry (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Soss, 2006), I reflect on the implications of my military background and evolving role as a researcher in the field. Finally, I reflect upon how the research interacted with the organizational context and its potential as a political lever in ongoing institutional developments.

Reflexivity and transparency as key evaluation criteria in the pragmatist and interpretive epistemic traditions refer to how the researcher, as a person, may provoke particular reactions in the field compared to other researchers, and the partiality of view that follows from the researcher's professional and academic experience and how they enter the field and negotiate identities (Czarniawska, 2008; Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. 133; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Watson, 2011; Yanow, 2014). As a former professional army NCO, active reservist, and now PhD student, I entered the fieldwork with several professional identities, which could provoke different reactions depending on which one my interlocutors selectively responded to, and which I could consciously or unconsciously enact and project in various combinations. Consequently, I address positionality throughout the chapter as an ongoing concern. Similarly, ethics is treated as an ongoing responsibility in fieldwork (Fujii, 2012) and a key aspect of reflexivity. Ethics is mainly focused on my relationship to the

field, where I aspire to the relational perspective put forward by Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016, p. 541).

From Methodology to Data Sources

In the theory chapter, I established the project's foundations in pragmatist philosophy (Dewey, 2008; Morgan, 2014; Peirce, 1878), emphasizing how, in pragmatism, experience links the external world and the world of our conceptions as two sides of the same coin: distinct, while only meaningful when engaged as an iterative relationship. In this view, beliefs and external reality are connected through action and reflection on the consequences of that action. The project's understanding of the relationship between participants' utterances in the interviews and the organizational practices they describe and reflect upon is informed by this relationship between beliefs and the external world. If beliefs are tools for people's actions, when participants describe their leadership practices, they reveal what they rely on to act effectively within their roles and practices. The interpretative tradition labels this relationship between meaning and social behavior constitutive causality (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, p. 141).

As I was interested in beliefs as part of the studied leadership practices, Soss expresses why interviews are a meaning-centered method and a direct approach to understanding how people construe their worlds: "Because I started with questions about how people construed their world, it seemed sensible to go out and talk with them"(Soss, 2006, p. 162). As I started out with theoretically motivated research questions on CSELs' authorization, the collective and individual dynamics in command teams, and how command teams engage formal and informal army organizations, qualitative interviewing was useful, as it combines depth of understanding with a systematic, analytic research design (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 159). Interviews are useful for gaining access to meaning, critical for understanding social reality, but nonetheless invisible and not directly discernible from pure observation:

> Important aspects of 'situations' are often not visible to the direct observer of interactions. [...] The ethnographer who observes an immediate interactional situation may miss important elements of the 'situation' in a larger sense: [...] Interviews, then, can sometimes reveal more relevant features of reality than immediate observation can, simply because they empower the researcher to probe about facts or about ideal responses or situations [... that] simply are not visible in everyday life (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 160).

Thus, qualitative interviews were a direct method for gaining access to beliefs and meanings as key elements of the studied leadership practices (Loscher et al., 2019; Schatzki, 2012).

Interviews can "reveal how institutional systems and the construction of social categories, boundaries, and status hierarchies organize social experience" (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 153). However, while participants' expressed beliefs and meanings are key elements of army command team practices, they are not direct representations of them. In the theory section, I argued for an intricate relationship between language and practices, where language is both important to understand organizational practices, as practices have meaning, behavioral, and material dimensions; and language is also increasingly shaped by ideology and idealized narratives with more abstracted accounts of practices (Schatzki, 2012, p. 24). When interviewees offered generalizations, I attempted to get beyond these potentially idealized narratives by probing for examples and concrete behavior (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 161). The prevalence of the extrasubjective understanding of supreme individual command authority (Article B) was an example of a generalized narrative that both obscured collective command team processes but also served an important role in constituting the commander–CSEL relationship.

Ethnography, in the sense of an embedded field study with a deployed battalion, constitutes the other main data method used in this dissertation. While the observational study was intended to have an equal status with the interview material, the embedded observations had to be relegated to a supportive role when I regrettably lost access to my detailed field notes. In the section below on the specifics of the embedded field study, I describe the interpretative and analytical role the observational study plays in the project.

Qualitative interviews and observation have obvious complementary strengths. Where interviews are suited to capture the meaning of social life, ethnographers have "privileged access to the immediate interactional situation and to many local codes or aspects of interactional style that may not be available to an interviewer" (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 160). Indeed, Watson (2011) argues that "doing the intensive type of close-observational or participative research that is central to ethnographic endeavor" (p. 204) is essential for understanding how organizations function, beyond what people say they do. Ethnography has inherent critical potential, from its commitment to examine the realities of how organizations "work" and test intuitive understandings about social life to questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about organizational life (Watson, 2011, p. 215).

My embedded stay with the deployed battalion allowed me to observe command teams and CSELs in action, engaging internally within command teams and externally with the organization, and forming shared reference points with participants in doing so. The shared reference points allowed me to ground some questions in the interviews in shared situations, probing participants to reflect on concrete episodes and connect their actions to broader

organizational understandings (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 161). Most importantly, the observations allowed me to see how command teams and CSELs act across various situations and practices. This likely improved the calibration of my interpretative lens, so that when conducting the coding and data analysis, I had to rely less on imagined organizational realities or my own military experience. Watson (2011, pp. 210, 216) notes how adopting an "ethnographic orientation" strengthens the effectiveness of other methods and increases the credibility and accessibility of contributions.

Data Analysis

The same type of data analysis is applied across the three studies. Namely, I followed the principles of within-case analysis (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 159–160) and aimed to uncover how practitioners make sense of their practices and what they perceive to be normal, effective, or problematic in relation to the authorization of CSELs, the collaboration between commanders and CSELs, and how command teams engage the formal and informal army organization.

The coding process followed the first- and second-cycle coding approach outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014; pp. 86–101) and was conducted in NVivo by me. Consistent with an abductive logic, where theoretical constructs and provisional inferences inform the analysis from the outset (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), I employed provisional coding (Miles et al., 2014; p. 92) and began the first-cycle coding with a list of broad pre-generated codes. These were based on the sub-themes explored through the interview guide and embedded observation and developed based on the conceptual tensions identified in policy and existing literature (e.g., on authority). I added inductive codes (Charmaz, 2006) when necessary while coding the first round of interviews, and then restarted the first-cycle coding process. I initiated the second coding cycle by reviewing the broad codes to familiarize myself with the content and to evolve my understanding. I then progressed by coding the broad codes into sub-thematic clusters I identified, e.g., individual and collective versions of sensemaking and decision-making. Following the second cycle of coding, illustrative quotes were transferred into an Excel sheet and grouped into columns according to their sub-thematic meanings. This structure provided an overview of quotes with very similar points across sub-thematics and facilitated the identification of representative quotes. The analysis was then built from representative quotes selected from these columns in interaction with the selected theoretical framework.

Coding related to the authorization of CSELs and the command team's engagement with the formal and informal army organization (Studies A and C) was conducted as part of the same first- and second-cycle coding process. However, the material proved too conceptually broad and empirically dense

to be fully developed within the scope of a single article. As a result, these themes were divided across two separate studies. To work with a manageable number of codes and sub-codes, the data analysis and coding for Study B were subsequently conducted as a distinct process.

Access to the Field and Research Agreements

Throughout the project, the relational perspective formulated by Cunliffe & Alcadipani (2016, p. 541) inspired my engagement with the Danish Army. Compared to more instrumental or transactional researcher–participant relationships, the relational perspective aspires to mutual and equal agency between the researcher and the participants (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p. 541). The relational perspective emphasizes 1) medium- to long-term mutually managed relationships, 2) interpersonal ethics, wherein the researcher holds themselves morally accountable to participants, 3) responsiveness to multiple and shifting expectations, and 4) balancing personal involvement with professional conduct. This approach entails shaping the research interactionally, seeing the participants as more than data sources, and being willing to share relevant aspects of one's identity. As I engaged in a long-term research collaboration with the Danish Army, which included embedded fieldwork, I saw the relational approach grounded in trust and mutual respect as the most ethically sound and practically effective stance to adopt.

The aspiration to collaborate on the research direction was relevant from the outset. When I entered the project, a research agreement based on a field experiment had already been made between the Danish Army, Århus University, and the Danish Defense College. During the initial organizational and literature research, I saw a need to change the research focus to a more explorative field study, as very little was known about the functioning of command teams and CSELs. Before submitting a revised project description to the university, I obtained support for the change from the army. The army had initially agreed to collaborate on another project, and I did not deem it ethical to try to change the focus before discussing the implications with the army and obtaining their support. The army supported the new direction without any reservations or requests.

Recruiting Participants

Security organizations like the government, military, and police are considered unconventional contexts and often present unique difficulties in obtaining research access (Bamberger & Pratt, 2010; Dick, 2005; Van Maanen, 1978). Fortunately, I did not experience access difficulties, and all invitations yielded positive responses. This is likely explained by several factors, which I

outline below: 1) I represented the Danish Defense College, which is a known entity within the military; 2) the research project was likely seen as a lever for the continuous institutionalization and improvement of command team and CSEL utilization; and 3) as a former practitioner and NCO I was less likely perceived as a "muckraker" wanting to expose the organization (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016).

When I contacted participants, I engaged in impression management (Goffman, 1959) by presenting my military experience on the same footing as my academic credentials in the information material. I assumed that displaying a partly military identity with considerable experience would help with swiftly building trust (Lester & Vogelgesang, 2012) and rapport with participants. As others have described (see, for example, Jaffe, 1984), I sensed that combat experience and service in certain units could translate to clout in military organizations. This is perhaps especially salient in the Danish Army, where the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have been a key focal point operationally and for soldiers in obtaining a valued warrior identity through deployment to combat theaters (Pedersen, 2017).

Setting out in the fieldwork, I expected some degree of reservation from participants regarding the utility of an academic study of the new leadership concepts, or maybe even anti-intellectualism, which some have found to be a feature of army organizations (Snider, 2016). These expectations proved false. The participants were motivated to contribute to an academic study and the production of a scholarly perspective on their leadership practices.

Individual Research Bargains

After receiving permission from the project sponsor in the army leadership to contact participants for interviews and operations, I opted not to use senior leadership's leverage when recruiting participants. Hence, the army did not inform the organization of the project or encourage participation. The project had no framing from army leadership that could affect participants' pre-understandings or associate the project with any specific interest from army leadership. My goals were that every participant find participation worthwhile and to avoid involving participants who were ordered but unmotivated to participate. I contacted all potential participants directly through the military's internal mail system and advertised the project directly to each eligible individual rather than having leadership select participants. As such, research bargains (Cunliffe and Alcadipani 2016, p. 537) were negotiated with every participant.

These choices were motivated by my research goals and ethics in accordance with the relational approach and mutual agency (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p. 541). I expected voluntary participants to provide richer data, and I

wanted only voluntary participants to invest working time or off-time in the research. Conversely, I expected that participation ordered through the chain of command could have detrimental effects on building reciprocal, trust-based relationships with participants. The principle of voluntariness did not introduce a selection bias, as all contacted participants opted to participate.

Field Study: Interviews

Selecting Participants

I sought broad representation by interviewing participants from all hierarchical levels across combat, combat support arms, logistics, and internationally deployed units. Regarding potential differences between types of arms, as a "warm-up" theme in the interviews, I asked participants about the specifics and history of their regiments and how they saw leadership conditions and styles between combat units and other types of units. Uniformly, participants saw leadership as more inclusive in non-combat units, as their deeper specialization necessitates input from specialists and NCOs informing officers' decision-making. In contrast, in the infantry, officers are seen as subject matter experts, as all Danish army officers are primarily trained as infantry officers. Hence, less specialist input is needed, and leadership can become more authoritarian. Coming from Moskos' (1977) observations and Boëne's (2000) logics of external conflict vs. internal cooperation, Ydén (2021) argues for a similar difference, in that ground combat units differ more from the culture of their surrounding society, while non-combat units have greater convergence in terms of norms and interaction patterns with the rest of society.

The 45 Danish interviews spanned all hierarchical levels that utilize the command team concept, which includes company, battalion, regiment, brigade, and army leadership. On all occasions except one, both members of the command teams were interviewed to gauge the consistency of their understandings, and in some instances, staff members near the command teams were also interviewed. Almost all participants also served under superior command teams, allowing them to experience the phenomenon from multiple perspectives. An overview of all interviews can be seen in Appendix 1.

Prior to the Danish fieldwork, I interviewed former strategic NATO commanders (#31, 32) and CSELs (#33, 53) to grasp the concept's international and institutional history and context. This information was used in contextualizing the studied concepts in the articles' introductions, but not in the analyses and findings.

All interviews were recorded and verbatim transcribed by me or research assistants. To maintain participant anonymity, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and hierarchical levels above the regiment are referred to

generically as “high-level” to prohibit identification, as there are few of these entities in the Danish Army.

Conducting the Interviews

Most interviews were conducted at the participants' offices at various Danish garrisons and lasted between one and two hours. Interviews with participants deployed to Iraq or Estonia were conducted over video.

During all interviews conducted in Denmark, I wore civilian clothes to foreground my researcher identity. In the initial brief before the interviews, I highlighted the project's academic goals to emphasize its scholarly purpose and distance myself from any impression that I was conducting an internal evaluation report on the command team concept. Indeed, some participants expressed such an initial understanding because of my affiliation with the Danish Defense College. To limit the possibility that assumed shared understandings between the participants and me obscured the articulation of important understandings, I instructed participants to respond to me as an outsider and to avoid esoteric language.

When conducting the interviews, it was my impression that participants perceived me as some combination of a researcher and an insider – a liminal figure. Participants sometimes used phrases such as “as you know.” These could be interpreted as an explicit acknowledgment of my insider status and trust that I understood their professional world.

When participants addressed me as an insider, I briefly indicated that I recognized their perspective and then returned the conversation to the interview questions. By doing this, I politely refused invitations to engage in matey peer-to-peer conversations, confirming common military worldviews. Some participants clearly saw me as an insider who could understand what outsiders apparently cannot: “Once, I tried to explain this to some civilians. You can't explain it because they don't understand shit. You can understand it better” (Regimental CDR, #39). This sentiment depicts military life as a particular lifeworld that outsiders do not understand. By seeing me as sufficiently an insider, participants met me with an openness that accompanies talking to someone who understands and perhaps even shares professional values and outlooks.

On the one hand, such sentiments among participants were conducive to motivating them to do their best to convey their understanding of their leadership practices. On the other hand, such sentiments could also assume a shared understanding and outlook even when that was not the case. When participants used esoteric formulations, I strived to always reframe the points back to them to test whether there was a shared understanding beneath these esoteric formulations.

My hybrid positionality as an insider/outsider undoubtedly shaped the interviews in some directions, as understanding is co-created (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Soss, 2006). Participants may have opened up more unrestrictedly. However, I am cautious to infer strongly about the direction of any shaping, as doing so risks projecting my own priors as intersubjective reality.

Field Study: Observations

The Role of the Observation Data and Lost Field Notes

The fieldwork included four weeks of embedded observation in a Danish Light Infantry Battalion deployed to NATO's "Forward Presence" mission in Latvia. The overall mission was part of NATO's response to Russian aggression against Ukraine, designed to signal that any incursion into the Baltic would trigger Article Five.

I chose to observe a deployed battalion, rather than units at home, to capture the more intense social and leadership climate of a setting approximating a "total institution" (Goffman, 1961). The deployment entailed a large number of soldiers living together, physically cut off from society and relatives for a considerable time, living an enclosed, formally administered life. While the mission's deterrence objective was real and the battalion trained for real war scenarios, the likelihood of actual war was not a salient concern in the battalion's everyday consciousness. Hence, as combat and high-consequence tasks were not an immediate reality for the deployed soldiers, the unit did not meet the characteristics of a "hot organization" (Ydén, 2021). From a research perspective, the battalion's deployed state offered distinct advantages. Leadership activity was abundant, with command teams and CSELs on duty from morning to evening. Participants were also more accessible for interviews beyond standard working hours.

The observation data were meant to provide insight into the doings, sayings, and material reality of situated command teams and CSELs (Loscher et al., 2019; Schatzki, 2012) across various organizational settings. Additionally, these insights were valuable as references and examples of concrete behavior that tied conversations within interviews to actual leader behavior and later served as interpretive anchors for the data analyses and interpretation.

Unfortunately, upon returning to Denmark, I lost the full field notes when my work computer locked up permanently. This meant that the observation study had to be relegated to a supportive role in the analysis. While many episodes from the field remain vivid in my memory, memory is not a reliable medium for reconstructing episodes and subsequent fine-grained empirical analysis. As Emerson et al. (2011, p. 222) note: "People forget and simplify experience; notes composed several days after observation tend to be sum-

marized and stripped of rich, nuanced detail." Still, while the observations were not used as a primary data source, it is necessary to reflect on the role of embedded fieldwork in the research process. The embedded stay with the battalion unavoidably shaped my interpretations and analytical lens (Schwartz-Shea, 2014; Yanow, 2014).

To contextualize this reflection, I briefly describe how the fieldwork was conducted. Balancing comprehensive notetaking with being sensitive to behavioral codes takes constant social calibration (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 222). When on the move with command teams or CSELs, I relied on jottings captured when I could withdraw from direct social interaction. I did not take notes when I was engaged in ad hoc conversation, as this seemed intrusive and at odds with the informal codes of interaction. In meetings, I placed myself outside the social sphere of the participants, allowing for detailed real-time notetaking.

Jottings and headnotes were later expanded into full field notes as soon as possible to capture immediacy and preserve experiences close to their moments of occurrence (Emerson et al., 2011, pp. 121-122 and 225). I used breaks between shadowing, quiet moments in the command tent, and evenings to write full field notes from jottings and mental notes. While descriptions always entail choices on inclusion/exclusion through sensemaking (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 245), I used separate columns for descriptions and reflections to support the separation between what was inferred and what was observed (Emerson et al., 2011, pp. 322-324).

Writing the field notes was a form of preliminary analysis, ordering experience and discovering patterns of action (Emerson et al., 2011, pp. 244-245). Hence, I did capture analytical insights from writing them, but losing the detailed field notes precluded later detailed data analysis and the discovery of new patterns through the coding process.

Thus, while the interviews deliver the main data source across the articles, the many hours spent observing command teams and CSELs in action, visiting soldiers, or speaking informally while in transit to formal arrangements invariably affected my perception and my interpretations during the data analysis. Experience informs and updates the mental models through which we perceive and understand data and cues (Endsley, 2015; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Watson (2011, p. 210) argues that understandings from embedded fieldwork have a critical role in interpreting other data sources: "If we were to work ethnographically, however, we would have a great deal more information to enable us to apply this sort of rigor to our handling of 'data'." The analytical utility of these memories of command teams and CSELs in action is limited by the fact that they are necessarily remembered abstractly and selectively. Although they enhance interpretive realism by grounding interpretation in

embodied experience rather than building mental models purely from interview data, to ensure validity, episodes recalled from memory are not treated as independent sources of data.

The following sections introduce the context of the embedded field study and assess the depth of my organizational access to provide readers with a sense of the observation context and how the observations informed the interviews and the data analysis.

Introduction to the Observation Context

I spent four weeks with the infantry battalion deployed in Latvia, where I alternated between following the battalion's four command teams and conducting interviews. The camp consisted of larger tents for work and living, a YMCA social area, and a few office containers. As we had winter conditions with snow the entire time, most longer social encounters took place inside tents.

I stayed at the meeting desk in the command tent when the battalion command team was doing office work. There, the commander, the chief of staff, and the battalion sergeant major had their desks arranged in a U-formation, with the commander at the center and the others on either side. Through this arrangement, I could work on my laptop and listen to the command trinity's sporadic conversations while they responded to emails and did desk work. My desk in the command tent provided a somewhat natural reason for my presence there.

The command tent had many visitors. During these visits, officers and senior NCOs entered intermittently to give updates on ongoing projects and, in return, received guidance or support for progressing the project. Much of the battalion's daily leadership and ad hoc decision-making happened in the command tent. In addition, there were weekly scheduled staff meetings for the battalion's administrative management and operational training activities. Staff meetings of the first type were for the staff only, minus the battalion command team, and had a relaxed, collegial atmosphere with room for jokes and participants interjecting comments. Operational staff meetings or order presentations had many more participants and a more serious and formal atmosphere. Participants of graduating importance stood around an inner circle of staff officers presenting orders to sub-commanders around a table with maps and illustrations. These meetings ended with the commander, who, after listening to the briefs and the corresponding coordination, gave his overall guidance for subsequent activity.

The battalion and company command teams visited their units in the field daily. I followed the command teams, making visits around the large training area where Danish and other NATO troops trained in the snow-covered, wooden terrain. These times spent in vehicles on the way to troop visits

provided good opportunities to have ad hoc conversations with command team members and see how they interacted with their personnel.

For living quarters, I was provided a space in the tent with the operations element of the staff. This element consisted of four captains and a staff sergeant. All on their first deployment, the captains were around ten years younger than I. The staff sergeant was older than I am, had completed many deployments, and had a reputation for having the battalion's most extensive operational experience. While I had never met the staff sergeant before, we shared several acquaintances and experiences. My shared military reference points with the staff sergeant invited in my military experience as a feature of my researcher role when I was with this group.

This operations element from off the staff became my primary social group for weekly sports events, visiting the dining facility, watching movies at night, and visiting museums and restaurants in Riga. While the battalion command teams were my primary research focus, living with the staff element and participating in social activities provided insights into the interpersonal dynamics of the overall battalion leadership.

Degrees of Organizational Access

Goffman's (1959) concepts of front stage and backstage can be used to assess the depth of access obtained in observational studies (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p. 537). The degree to which ethnographers are immersed affects the type of data we obtain and thus warrants reflection. Front-stage access is characterized by the organization's members managing their impressions by deliberately acting out identities and images intended to uphold a preferred perception and the formal company line. Backstage or secondary access is where organizations' real work and social interactions happen.

While doing my fieldwork, I obtained a level of second-degree access. Hanging around from morning until evening and participating in activities spanning meetings, office time, troop visits, playing sports, dining, and social visits to Riga made me a somewhat natural part of the battalion staff's social environment. I was allowed to participate in all types of meetings. My assessment that I had some degree of second-level access is based on encounters such as certain interlocutors sharing how they did not think particular colleagues lived up to role expectations. While never used directly, such information did inform questions on role expectations generally in the interviews.

Full access can be understood in logistical terms as "to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whomever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all this for whatever period of time you need to satisfy your research purposes" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 33). In the logistical sense, I had close to full access. However, the degree of access should

also be considered socially, as “there is always an inside further inside the inside” (Ortner, 2010, p. 215) beyond the researcher's visibility. When one studies the interrelations of formal and informal organizations, the “inside further inside the inside” can indeed be of relevance, and access in the material sense does not equate to social access.

Most interlocutors maintained a somewhat professional demeanor around me. In my own military experience, a lot was going on in the hallways, where the sensibility and meaning of current events were constantly negotiated. However, while conducting the fieldwork, I witnessed limited amounts of such backstage negotiation. Either the battalion had a low degree of conflict and internal politics, or they occurred beyond my level of social access. The fact that the battalion was not faced with challenging objectives or casualties like the Danish battalions have been in Iraq and Afghanistan likely contributed to the low-pressure atmosphere.

Researcher and Soldier: Reflexivity and Positionality

While brief reflections are embedded throughout this chapter to situate them in specific moments of fieldwork, this section consolidates key reflections on positionality and the opportunities and limitations of being both a practitioner and a researcher.

Regarding “the partiality of view” of the researcher, my practitioner background had both advantages and pitfalls. My key challenge was to use my organizational experience and socialization instrumentally as a perceptual and interpretive frame while distancing myself analytically from observed practices. While my experience as an NCO did not provide me with a pre-existing understanding of senior NCOs’ organizational roles in the context of command teams, it likely sensitized me to the involved organizational and social dynamics.

Although I had my first professional socialization in the army, all my experience, besides two months in boot camp, was from units that did not have private soldiers, and where senior NCOs played key leadership roles. These units were relatively NCO-centric compared to regular army units, with experienced NCOs taking on more leadership than is the norm in the army. From the outset of the project, I was conscious that my experience from these irregular units was not representative of regular army units, which are mostly centered around training and leading relatively inexperienced private soldiers. While armies have different degrees of stratification (Soeters, 1997), the stratification between the officer corps and the NCOs is somewhat similar to that between the NCO corps and the private soldiers in regular units (Jaffe, 1984; Kirke, 2009). This stratification is institutionalized in practices such as maintaining separate bars for officers, NCOs, and privates within Danish army

regiments. In contrast, the units where I served operated with less predefined social stratification based on personnel category, as NCOs led other NCOs, and the senior NCOs often had been instructors for the unit's officers and commanders as they went through selection and basic training. Thus, I was aware that my experience had the potential to bias me towards exaggerating the influence of NCOs and the informal organization around them and underestimating the significance of formality and hierarchical differentiation between personnel categories that characterize regular army units.

Evolving Role in the Military

I did not transition directly from service as an NCO to embarking on this research project. Before starting the Ph.D. project, I worked as an academic lecturer at the Army Officer Academy for four years, teaching leadership to future army officers and with army officers as colleagues. In addition to five years at university before that, these experiences gave me a more holistic understanding of the army and defense, including a greater appreciation and understanding of the roles and contributions of the different categories of military personnel. In addition, these experiences also evolved my professional identity from an operational NCO and in the direction of a military academic.

While I left full-time operational service several years ago, military socialization is also deeply embodied. In boot camp, where recruits experience the *rite de passage* from civilians to soldiers, the behavior of displaying reverence for rank and the chain of command is drilled into them. I felt the effects of this socialization when conducting the fieldwork. When interviewing higher-level commanders, I was often more self-conscious at first and had to be careful not to self-censor compared to interviewing senior NCOs, whose time I felt more comfortable spending. This self-censoring effect is similar to when researchers conduct interviews with elite members of society who sit well above the researcher in economic, political, or cultural hierarchies in the perception of the researcher and/or the interviewee (Conti & O'Neil, 2007; Littig, 2009).

The effect of this perceived power distance wore off over time as I became used to interviewing high-level commanders. Furthermore, evaluating perceived power differences and their consequences is complex, with many factors at play. Perceived as an NCO, I was part of the same organizational hierarchy as the commanders, albeit many rungs below. In the informal military hierarchy, my background in special operations likely elevated my standing somewhat, as this line of service is considered an exclusive career path. Lastly, as a junior researcher, my relationship to both the formal and informal military hierarchy was likely ambiguous, as researchers are outsiders to the military's social system and do not occupy a recognized position within it. In interviews, I actively positioned myself as a researcher, an outsider to the

military social system, enabling participants to speak without relating to me through internal power structures.

Presentation, Participation, and Conflicting Professional Ethoses

While conducting this fieldwork in Latvia, I wore a uniform to blend in with the soldiers with whom I lived. However, I determined that participatory observations would not benefit my research goals. Participating in the activities and work of those studied is a well-established method to improve understanding of the lifeworld and work practices of those studied (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016; Watson, 2011). However, with an extensive military background, I discerned that participation in work activities would entail the risk of me falling back to my existing understanding of how soldering and military leadership should be done, rather than distancing myself enough to explore how the new leadership concept was enacted and had perhaps changed the very practices I had been shaped by.

I found this passive, observing behavior challenging because it was directly at odds with the ethos of my former profession, which was to always find work (Danielsen, 2012, 2020). Having spent years in international military camps as a member of the operational structure, I found it difficult not to be practically involved. I even felt that my observant behavior and asking questions associated with novices and outsiders were damaging the brand of my former unit, in case my interlocutors saw me as a representative of that.

Navigating Identities and the Pull to "Go Native"

When conducting the field studies, the pull to "go native" arose through social invitation and psychological factors. "Going native" happens when the ethnographer loses analytical distance by becoming too identified with the people being studied (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Van Maanen, 2011). In this section, I reflect upon how I attempted to navigate the balance between becoming overly aligned with the participants and "going cynical," i.e., becoming excessively detached.

The pull to go native was most salient during the fieldwork in Latvia, where the research context also served as my social context during that period. While I left full-time military service more than a decade ago, living in a military camp among soldiers and wearing a uniform activated the contextual forces (Pearce, 2007) in favor of behaving and thinking like a soldier and representing my former unit. The pull occurred socially when interlocutors invited me into the soldier role, and from inside when my prior professional experiences nudged me into thinking and acting like a soldier, thereby enacting a familiar identity.

An example of the former occurred when I followed a command team to an active shooting range, and the instructor on the range, whom I had never met, asked me if I could provide some shooting instructions. I politely declined the request as I perceived it as a distraction from my role and research tasks. I found that invitations to take on the role of a soldier, i.e., a contextual force (Pearce, 2007), could be evaded, where a subtle diversion on my part worked as an implicative force (Pearce, 2007), affirming my social role as a researcher.

The pull to go native also arose psychologically through prior socialization and identification. While I generally succeeded in holding my research agenda at the forefront, the urge to participate overpowered me in one situation. While traveling with a command team, we came upon a minor logistical issue in the training area, and we stopped to assist. The involved personnel were uncertain about how to resolve it. After unsuccessful attempts, I discreetly instructed a leader on how I thought he should solve the issue. While I do not think this one-off situation affected my role as a researcher, it illustrates the tension between the soldier and research ethoses. From a research perspective, the unsuccessful addressing of the issue was not my concern. In fact, it provided a situation where I could observe a command team engage with soldiers and peers in an unexpected minor incident. However, I found the unsuccessful attempts to address the issue distressing and instinctively intervened. This urge to intervene on my part illustrates a broader phenomenon and can likely be explained by my association with the army as a source of identity and belonging. As a source of identity, it likely feels better to be associated with a seemingly capable organization.

When seen as a soldier, I was sometimes treated as an expert due to my background in special operations, and when positioning myself as a researcher, I was a novice and a self-imposed alien to the military organization. Hence, emphasizing the researcher identity, which I saw as necessary for the research goals, meant distancing myself from the core soldier community and familiar behavior. In this process, I recognized Watson's (2011) and Czarniawska's (2014) observations that fieldwork is emotionally demanding and sometimes socially awkward due to the ongoing negotiation of unfamiliar, overlapping roles and a changing sense of self. Attempting to navigate the different ethoses of research and soldering, I strived to foreground the goals of the researcher while behaving in a manner that was recognizable to myself and my interlocutors. Ibarra's (1999) notion of provisional selves and how we experiment with new behaviors when adapting to new professional roles felt illuminating for my experience as a former soldier turned novice researcher. The key difference is that practitioners are likely to seek to stabilize or confirm elements of a cherished social order, whereas the pragmatist researcher's task is to open up taken-for-granted and conventional wisdom (Watson, 2011).

The Research as a Potential Lever in Organizational Politics

The projects' focus on particular organizational domains, the field study itself, and the way participants were invited to make sense of topics chosen by the researcher in interviews and subsequent publications all influence the studied domain to some extent. This highlights research ethics as an ongoing responsibility (Fujii, 2012). This section reflects on how the project may have affected the army and the agendas it may have aligned with.

From the start, I was conscious that the command team concept could be an object of considerable organizational politics. From a surface level, it was salient that the concept seemingly diverted a certain amount of power from the officer corps to the NCO corps, breaking officers' monopoly in senior leadership. Neo-Weberian theory of professions and the concept of social closure would predict that the officer corps would not voluntarily share its privileges and monopolies on certain kinds of work (Abbot, 1993; Saks, 2012, 2016; Weeden, 2002). In addition, most officers from the Danish Defense College I spoke with before embarking on the fieldwork, who had been away from the operational structure for a number of years and who had no first-hand experience with the command team concept, saw little benefit in the command team concept and CSEL function, thus confirming the theoretical expectation that it is a controversial development in army leadership. Hence, I embarked on the first round of interviews expecting to discover controversy around the concept and was surprised when participants consistently saw the command team concept as a valuable development.

As my army sponsor was also the primary driver behind the implementation of the command team structure, there could have been an incentive for him to introduce me to participants who held especially positive views of the command team concept and the CSEL function. However, I did not experience any interference in who I invited to participate, and I had no way to evaluate how potential participants saw the concept. In fact, the only recommendation for a potential participant from my sponsor was a commander who, I found out during the interview, had seemingly spirited disagreements with my sponsor on implementation details. It thus did not appear that army leadership attempted to affect the findings in any direction.

Two CDRs expressed interest during the interviews in what the project might find about command teams. One had the belief that the concept would have to be further institutionalized before realizing its full benefits for the army and thus urged me not to draw bombastic conclusions about the concept's utility in this early phase. The other was keen that I understood what he saw (as did many others, I found out later) as a flawed job design for CSELs at the company level. This participant may have seen my project as a potential

lever for a minor structural change that he and others had not succeeded in bringing about. I responded to these commanders that the purpose of the project was academic knowledge production and that practical evaluations of the structure's implementation were not the goal of the project.

As decision authority in the army resides with the officer corps, and as the development of the command team concept was primarily driven by top-level NCOs who do not have decision authority, the project may have been seen as a valuable opportunity to maintain organizational attention on the concept while it was further institutionalized. During the project, I was invited several times to commands across the army, navy, and air force to present preliminary findings. Most of these presentations were initiated by top-level NCOs, which indicates a greater interest in keeping command teams on the organizational agenda among senior NCOs relative to commanders. This asymmetry of interest in bringing the concept to the organizational agenda may have served as motivation for senior NCOs' support of the research project. However, there were no indications that the perceived difference in interest between the personnel categories corresponded with organizational conflict lines, and all invited officers wanted to participate.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the main findings of the dissertation. It begins by addressing the overall research question – how command teams and the CSEL function are enacted as leadership practices in the Danish Army – before presenting the specific findings from Studies A, B, and C.

This dissertation explores how command teams enact a differentiated leadership system in which CSELs perform leadership functions that support formal command by complementing the formal structure at its limitations. The command team concept legitimizes CSELs as informal and relationally authorized leaders who often wield substantial leadership influence. This lack of codification and formal authority is notable in the otherwise extensively codified army organization and constitutes the CSEL as a structurally ambiguous leadership role. Nevertheless, the constitution of this role enables leadership functions that formal command cannot readily perform.

CSELs are authorized relationally and locally through a dual process of being perceived as extensions of their commanders' authority, in part through commanders' public endorsements, and as leaders in their own right, based on social contracts and trust with unit leaders and soldiers.

Within command teams, CSELs function as less guarded sounding boards for commanders, opening a space for open-ended reflection that is less available within the chain of command. This relationship collectivizes sensemaking, a critical antecedent to decision-making. These dynamics within command teams are enabled relationally through trust and confidentiality in combination with a shared belief in supreme individual command authority, i.e., the formal hierarchical structure.

At the organizational level, CSELs' relational leadership enables them to connect understandings across hierarchical levels and bridge the formal and informal spheres. In downward communication, this supports translations of command intent to enlisted personnel, and upward in surfacing soldiers' sentiments and concerns that sometimes do not travel up the chain, thereby creating a complementary information structure.

In sum, the relational, informal, and uncodified leadership of CSELs seems to strengthen formal command by reinforcing commanders' influence from within the informal organization and the unit's social fabric and, in the other direction, providing command with informal insights. While the fundamental difference in the constitution of CSELs versus commanders introduces structural ambiguity, it also enables connection, coordination, and cohesion

across the army organization in a manner that formal structure alone likely cannot achieve.

Below, the findings of Studies A through C are summarized in further detail.

Study A: The Dual Authorization of CSELs

Study A addresses the research question: How are CSELs authorized in the Danish Army, and what are the implications for their leadership?

The study conceptualizes CSELs' leadership as underpinned by a dual authorization process. First, CSELs are construed as extensions of their commander's authority. Second, they are authorized relationally, manifested as social contracts with soldiers, NCOs, and subcommanders. The strength and viability of these two dimensions of authorization are interrelated.

The analysis shows how commanders directly and symbolically authorize their CSELs. This includes direct instructions to sub-commanders to comply with CSELs' input – e.g., "I have told the officers: When John visits you in the field [...] and sees something he thinks is wrong and addresses it – then you change it!" (Battalion CDR, #46) – and consistent visual displays of unity, such as co-presence during troop visits and public events. These practices frame the CSEL as the commander's confidant and representative. As expressed by a battalion chief of staff: "There is no formal authority, but it is created through this relation. He is the battalion CDR's closest [collaborator]" (#52).

However, this authorization through command proximity is insufficient to sustain leadership on its own. CSELs must also build personal authority rooted in trust, credibility, and loyalty by informing commanders of soldiers' views and conditions. The necessity of CSELs achieving a status as leaders in their own right and taking personal ownership of messages is expressed by two high-level CSELs: "If I just run behind the commander, then they look at me as just a bag carrier" (#38) and "I never go down and say 'CDR says I need to do something about this' [says it in a docile voice]. I will never say that" (#43).

One important way CSELs are authorized from below is by demonstrating loyalty to the soldiers, particularly when conveying critical feedback to commanders. Because commanders are often focused on mission success and displaying a "can-do" attitude upwardly, CSELs act as conduits for soldiers' experiences and perspectives, such that they can be considered in decision-making. Their authorization from soldiers depends on CSELs' perceived truthfulness in loyally representing enlisted personnel's viewpoints in formal command forums:

> The private personnel, especially the NCO group, can trust that the CSEL tells the commander the truth. He does not sweet-talk or give lip service to the commander. Because, if that is found out, he is history. At least with the groups. And he does not do that. (Regiment CDR, #39)

The dual nature of CSEL authorization allows CSELs to enact a more relational, guiding, and mentoring leadership style than commanders. Engagement with CSELs affords subordinates, including sub-commanders who are expected to raise issues within the chain of command, a perceived low-stakes space to discuss concerns and draw on the CSEL's experience and up-to-date understanding of the orientations within the chain of command.

While the way CSELs are authorized grants influence, it also introduces ambiguity regarding their formal status. The analysis shows how CSELs often frame their communication as guidance rather than orders, even as audiences are aware of CSELs' status as extensions of command authority: "There is no doubt. If you interview some of those command sergeant majors, they will probably experience it as an order" (High-level CSEL, #38). This dynamic shows how conceptual tensions and ambiguity in policy create ambiguity in practice. CSELs' instructions are framed as influence, likely to avoid violations of the chain of command.

In summary, Study A finds that CSELs' leadership in the Danish Army is underpinned by a dual authorization process. This allows CSELs to exert significant leadership influence despite their lack of formal authority, but it also renders their status ambiguous. Their ability to lead hinges on their capacity to navigate expectations with commanders, peers, and subordinates, making the function central but precarious.

Study B: Individual and Collective Dimensions in Command Team Practice

Study B addresses the research question: How do individual and collective command dimensions interact in the everyday practices and actions of the army's command teams?

The study finds that command teams enact a form of co-leadership that features extensive collective characteristics while retaining core hierarchical elements. The extensive collective processes in command teams are enabled and framed by an institutional understanding of ultimate and individual command authority. In contrast, leading units are seen as a shared endeavor in command teams. Thus, the practitioners make sense of leading units as a shared task and moral responsibility based on the commanders' individual, formal responsibility. As stated by a commander: "Thomas [the CSEL] has the same task as I do. However, I alone carry the responsibility" (#44). The shared

belief in the commander's ultimate individual authority and in CSELs' position outside the formal chain of command appears to provide fertile ground for the co-leaders to develop professional relationships grounded in interpersonal trust and confidentiality.

While formal command-and-control relationships typically characterize CDRs' interactions with their deputies, the open-ended sensemaking processes between CDRs and CSELs are enabled by personal relationships founded on trust, confidentiality, and sometimes vulnerability. A high-level CDR describes the need for confidentiality: "You have to have a trusting relationship, which enables me to share almost everything [...] there are actually very, very few things I do not share. I think that is the essential prerequisite for the command team to function [...]" (#44). He goes on to contrast this with his relationship with his deputy commander: "There are also issues where I do not include the chief of staff, which I discuss with Martin instead [the CSEL] because we spend so much time together." These qualities enable more open-ended sensemaking, as commanders do not risk deviating from the role expectations governing the chain of command when candidly sharing thoughts and leadership challenges with their CSELs.

The analysis shows how sensemaking, a critical precursor to decision-making, predominantly unfolds collectively within command teams. CDRs and their CSELs engage in ongoing discussions, leveraging their differences in professional backgrounds and organizational interfaces to foster a shared understanding of their units and environments. The collective sensemaking in command teams is often consequential as it precedes the guidance, intents, and orders commanders communicate to the chain of command and the staff. A regimental commander described how sensemaking can also include shared decision-making: "We make many decisions together - both in relation to his [the CSEL] area of responsibility and my broad responsibility. [...] We freely discuss and make decisions together. However, it is solely my responsibility" (#39), and how dissent within the command team is appreciated and taken seriously: "We don't always agree about everything when we set out [...] then we can go through two or three rounds before we land somewhere and say, 'That is probably the wisest solution, right?'" (#39).

Participants often framed the collective processes in command teams in individualizing terms, as exemplified by a high-level commander's statement that "I think it is paramount that he [the CSEL] is deep in my head and knows my thoughts, what I want to achieve, what my commander's intent is, and how I am as a person. Therefore, the relationship is so critical" (#44). This framing re-individualizes the often co-created understandings within command teams.

In summary, the study finds that command teams function extensively as sensemaking forums where commanders and CSELs continuously create actionable meaning around problems, possible courses of action, and the units they command. Decision-making often involves shared dynamics but is viewed organizationally through the extra-subjective understanding of individual command authority. The two main command team activities, sensemaking and decision-making, are shaped by the context of 1) the institutional understanding of supreme individual command authority and 2) the generally high levels of trust and confidentiality between commanders and CSELs. The key findings are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Study C: Bridging Formal and Informal Army Organization

Study C addresses the research question: How do command teams integrate formal and informal domains within the Danish Army organization? Study C finds that command teams in the Danish Army function as bridges between the chain of command and the informal organization surrounding the NCO corps, supporting key organizational functions such as information sharing, sensemaking, and problem-solving across the formal-informal divide and hierarchical levels. This enables a functional synergy that maintains the chain of command's integrity while supporting organizational cohesiveness by integrating outputs from these distinct domains. The bridging occurs through two main mechanisms: 1) Insights, sentiments, and possible problem-solutions from the informal organization are fed into the formal structure through command teams and CSELs as intermediaries, and 2) background information

behind formal messaging and the commander's intent is infused into informal sensemaking processes though CSELs' dual engagement with the informal organization and membership in formal decision forums. The first mechanism enables the integration of soldiers' views on plans, conditions, and problems into staff processes and command teams' decision-making. The second mechanism allows CSELs to contextualize and explain formal directives within the informal organization and to address understandings that diverge from formal communication. This enables frustrations and misunderstandings to be addressed and directives to be made meaningful to soldiers. Below, some of these processes and functions are illustrated using practitioners' perspectives.

CSELs' informal network of primarily NCOs is rooted in their typically long tenures within particular regiments, which are different from officer career trajectories with more dispersed connections. These informal NCO relationships enable a communicative compression of the hierarchical structure by facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges across levels that would otherwise be formally separated. A battalion chief of staff describes:

> Some of the command levels in the hierarchical structure are compressed because there is a forum among the NCOs in a different manner. And it can become very tangible [...], but there also is a need for issues first to be processed in a more fluent structure so people can get professional back-and-forth. (#1)

These interactions allow issues to be framed and socially processed before formal action is taken, likely enhancing practical relevance and quality in decisions.

The informal structure functions as a secondary information channel that supports commanders' organizational awareness by surfacing issues that might not otherwise travel up the chain of command. Here, a battalion commander described this function:

> It provides [...] like another radar tuned in another frequency [...]. It is an enhanced SA [situational awareness] for me. [...] There can be examples where a company commander thinks things are going well [...]. And then you hear from other circles that people are pretty annoyed by the pressure and find it difficult to tell it to their commander (#10).

Despite stated "open-door" policies, commanders frequently encounter a filtered version of organizational reality, as described by another battalion commander: "If I [...] go out now and visit someone and ask how things are going, they say it's going really well. I can already tell you that, knowing full well that there are frictions out there" (#50).

In the opposite direction, CSELs interject background information from formal domains when they sense from soldiers that informal narratives are

diverging from formal messaging and the conditions that shape directives. As explained by a high-level CSEL:

> I can do that because I am included in all these forums. So my level of knowledge is quite high. [...] When speaking directly to the soldiers, I can dismantle frustrations on the lower tactical levels. [...] It is about verifying information because many things are lost in the hierarchical levels in between (#38).

While such actions from CSELs may tether informal sensemaking to formal messaging, informal sensemaking has the dual potential of improving understanding of tasks and conditions while also diverging from chain-of-command messaging and intent. As stated by a high-level commander:

> I receive the formal tasks from you, but I hear the other way around... Maybe I am a bit unsure about something, and then I have another relation to discuss, "What the hell was meant by that?" [...] And that makes the mission strong. I think the understanding and execution are better. However, it necessitates a very close understanding on all levels down so it does not become an alternative chain of command (#37).

In units' daily activities, the informal organization can enable flexible problem-solving in practical areas like resource sharing and logistics. There, mutual adjustment between NCOs can substitute for slower chain-of-command coordination, as described by a company commander:

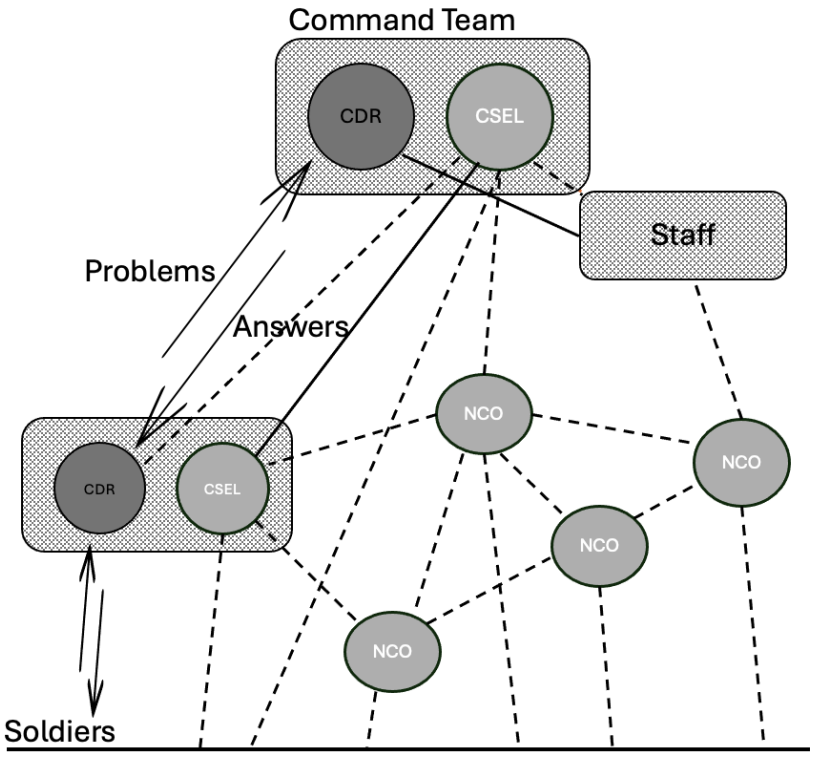
> It provides a network that often can perform tasks quicker and more effectively, and that creates cohesion across all units in the garrison. Which is not burdened by the same things as the chain of command sometimes is. It can be a bit bureaucratic (#4).

When provisional solutions are developed informally, command teams can act as a transfer mechanism for integrating them into the chain of command, giving them the legitimizing effect of further bureaucratic processing.

By facilitating these functions, command teams and CSELs likely underpin organizational cohesiveness through increased synergy between the formal and informal army organizations. This study proposes an integrative framework for understanding the relationship between the formal and informal organization in command team-based military leadership.

Figure 3 summarizes the findings, illustrating how command teams bridge formal and informal structures. It does not portray a particular hierarchical level and simplifies the actual army organization, where each command team typically oversees three to five sub-units. Solid arrows represent the formal chain of command, while dotted lines indicate informal relationships. Command teams integrate these domains, aligning formal and informal information flows.

Figure 3.


Command Team
CDR
CSEL
Staff
Problems
Answers
NCO
NCO
CDR
CSEL
NCO
NCO
Soldiers

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter concludes the dissertation by discussing how the findings contribute to our understanding of NCOs as "the backbone of the military," how they are likely shaped by the Danish Army's cultural context, and how they may transfer to other key NATO countries. I also explore how command team practices contribute to debates on the collectivization of command, why the findings may present a surprisingly harmonious picture of NCOs entering unit leadership and selected practical implications that can be drawn.

"The Backbone": Illuminating the Black Box

The notion that "NCOs are the backbone of the military" is a pervasive and powerful metaphor in military doctrine and rhetoric (Dandeker & Yden, 2022; Edwards et al., 2014; Hogan et al., 2003), implying NCOs' centrality, reliability, and indispensability. However, NCOs' roles in military organizations' functioning and leadership have not led to a proportional examination in military sociology (Dandeker & Yden, 2022), and they are abstractly and normatively described in policies (NATO, 2015, 2017, 2020). The metaphor, therefore, risks becoming a rhetorical placeholder more than an analytical category that can lend substance to discussions of the role of NCOs in evolving militaries.

By providing a granular, empirical account, the dissertation attempts to shine light into elements of the black box of the "backbone" metaphor. Across the three papers, it becomes clear that CSELs in the Danish Army occupy positions that are both central to military leadership and structurally ambiguous. CSELs do not command units or elements, nor are they part of the chain of command. Still, they facilitate information flows, sensemaking, and problem-solving across formal and informal spheres and hierarchical levels, thereby likely playing central roles in organizational cohesion. Their authority is derived from a combination of their proximity to command authority, i.e., gained from the formal structure, and the personal authority that is built through relational trust with soldiers and leaders. While a "backbone" can be thought of as passive structural support, the findings from the dissertation reframe CSELs as performing an active, multi-dimensional leadership function beyond NCOs' established functions and as first-line executors and conduits between officers' plans and soldiers' understanding and execution (Huntington, 1957; Siebold, 2001; Stouffer et al., 1949a).

Based on the three studies, the dissertation suggests four interrelated leadership functions performed by CSELs. First, as shown in Article C, CSELs

serve a *bridging function* between the chain of command and informal organizational life (Barnard, 1968; Hunter et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Through their connections to the informal organization surrounding the NCO corps, they enable a secondary informal channel that compresses the hierarchy in some respects and allows informal issues, concerns, and insights to reach formal decision-making spaces. In the other direction, they help translate directives into understandings that are intelligible and actionable in soldiers' everyday contexts. This function extends Stouffer et al.'s (1949) description of NCOs as intermediary figures between officers and enlisted men, with a dual allegiance and full membership in neither group. While Stouffer focused on the interpersonal dynamics of platoon sergeants, CSELs serve a similar function at the organizational level, where CSELs and the informal organization surrounding the NCO corps function as an organizational intermediary between the chain of command and the soldiers. Through this intermediate role, CSELs support the integration of domains that otherwise risk being fragmented and unresponsive to each other.

Second, as shown in Articles A, B, and C, CSELs are *co-creators of unit command*. As members of command teams, they are involved in sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) and organizational problem-solving, influencing the understanding of problems and commanders' intent and representing unit command to soldiers and officers. Still, they have no formal authority or mandate to issue orders (du Gay & Vikkelsø, 2016; Weber, 2019). In this manner, the metaphor reveals a jurisdictional paradox: Senior NCOs contribute to unit command in areas where they have no formal jurisdiction. The metaphor may thus conceal the authorization processes that sustain informal leadership in the absence of codified authority.

Third, as shown across the three studies, CSELs are *ambassadors of informal and relational leadership*. CSELs lead through relationally construed personal authority gained from social contracts of trust (English, 2019; Joosse, 2014; Joullié et al., 2020; Weber, 2019) with both commanders and soldiers. With commanders, they are given authority through trust, confidentiality, experience, and loyalty. With soldiers, they are authorized by being credible, present, and loyal to the feedback that soldiers communicate. This dual authorization is interactionally sustained, potentially fragile, and always up for re-negotiation; though when well-managed, it also enables access, influence, and advocacy across the organization. The backbone metaphor must thus also account for the relational work CSELs perform.

Fourth, and closely related to the third function, CSELs and the broader informal NCO organization serve an intermediate *function of informal sensemaking and cohesion*. Where commanders can appear distant or inaccessible, CSELs and NCOs are more visible, embedded, and available to the enlisted

personnel. NCOs thus become first-line translators between directives, making sense of them and of soldiers' reactions, addressing misunderstandings, confusion, and frustrations (as also found by Stouffer, Suchman, DeVinney, et al., 1949). Informal sensemaking allows for questions, skepticism, and clarification that can be difficult to raise within the chain of command. CSELs and the broader NCO organization thus uphold a central social infrastructure that mitigates some of the alienating effects of the chain of command (Barnard, 1968; Wu et al., 2021). This adds to our understanding of the interpretive and emotional labor done in the informal military organization, as shown in ethnographic works by Danielsen (2012, 2017, 2020), Jaffe (1984), and Kirke (2009). This interpretive and emotional labor is likely also central to executing mission command by enabling informed initiative (Shamir, 2011; US Army, 2019; M. Van Creveld, 1985) through soldiers' improved holistic understanding and affective commitment to courses of action.

The findings from this project illuminate the leadership functions performed by CSELs and suggest a more relational and organizationally embedded model of military professionalism and leadership that moves beyond officer- and jurisdiction-centered accounts (Dandeker & Yden, 2022; Libel, 2020; Segal & Angelis, 2009b). The exploratory nature of this study suggests senior NCOs as organizational actors beyond their recognized roles as technical experts and intermediaries between commanders' intent and soldiers' execution (Segal & Angelis, 2009b; Siebold, 2001).

Transferability and Relevance to Other Armies

In line with pragmatist (Dewey, 2008; Morgan, 2014; Peirce, 1878) and interpretative (Schwartz-Shea, 2014) perspectives, this dissertation sees knowledge as locally situated, and questions of transferability thus become more relevant than questions of generalizability. By writing the articles in the style of thick description (Geertz 1973), as much as the format allows, I have attempted to provide a nuanced depiction of the studied setting using narrative and participants' own voices to supply readers with a hopefully sufficient foundation for evaluating which findings and mechanisms may apply to other settings with varying degrees of similarity (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 46).

While the idea of transferability partially shifts this task to readers who have insight into other and potentially similar settings, it is worth reflecting on how the dissertation's findings may reflect the Danish Army's culture and how this may differ from other militaries.

Reflections on the Effect of Danish Military Culture

While not recent, Soeters(1997) conducted a comparative study on how culture in military academies compares both across nations and with their surrounding civilian societies. This can provide some indication of how Danish Army culture compares to those of the United Kingdom and the United States, as examples of important NATO countries. Soeters concludes that militaries are both shaped by their national cultures and share international institutional similarities (Soeters, 1997, p. 25).

The Danish Army Academy scores relatively low on power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance and is classified as non-bureaucratic and occupational (Soeters, 1997, p. 23). Soester also characterizes it as "civilianized" in that it differs relatively little from its surrounding society (Soeters, 1997, p. 22). Other studies have found that Danish society scores low on formality (Royal Danish Defense College, 2015). The UK military academy, in contrast, scored extremely high on power distance, and higher than expected considering the surrounding UK culture (Soeters, 1997, p. 22). Soeters speculates that this may reflect that "class-related social relations going as far back as the aristocratic society of former times still hold up in the UK" (p. 22). Lastly, the United States scores moderately high on power distance and high on masculinity, which aligns with a competitive, achievement-oriented leadership culture.

These differences suggest that the Danish Army, relatively, values egalitarianism, trust, a preference for consensus and direct communication, and possibly greater openness to informal authority and relational leadership. This may increase the Danish Army's disposition to informal and egalitarian leadership compared to armies that place a greater value on power distance, masculinity, and formality.

In their self-understanding, the Danish CSELs I interviewed indeed exert a different leadership style compared to colleagues in the United States and the United Kingdom. Below, I use Kirke's (2009) ethnographic work on the UK Army to illustrate potential differences in role expectations and leadership styles between CSELs of the two armies.

Danish CSELs vs. the British Tradition

My findings from the Danish Army may not represent the role expectations, leadership behavior, and informal credibility criteria of CSELs from the Anglo tradition. Senior Danish CSELs, most of them having served intensely alongside British and American troops in the theaters of Iraq and Afghanistan, enact a comparatively more approachable leadership style in their own self-understanding. As one high-level CSEL put it during a command team course

planning meeting: "We don't do it like the Americans, walking around yelling at people." To illuminate how role expectations and leadership behavior of Danish CSELs may differ from the Anglo-American tradition, which, of course, is not without its own internal differences either, I use the careful ethnographic work of Kirke (2009) on the British Army.

Kirke (2009) describes the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) as "the most powerful figure in the [sergeants'] mess"[8] (p. 10) and shows how his authority is partly sustained by being socially separate from the sergeants with whom he once served. Friendship is explicitly constrained: "The Regimental Sergeant Major was not expected to be on familiar terms with his colleagues in the sergeants' mess, no matter how well he had got on with them in the past" (p. 38). These quotes show clear power and status differentials within the NCO group and that, especially for the RSM, formal decorum and social distance to lower-ranking NCOs are part of the role expectations. However, even as British RSMs seem to rely more on formal distance and seem less approachable compared to their Danish counterparts, they are still key contact points for soldiers on matters that they are hesitant to bring to the chain of command:

> Although he likes to keep a certain amount of distance between him and the soldiers, he needs to keep in touch with them. He does this by direct contact with the private soldiers and through the company sergeant majors and other senior NCOs. […] "I would still have private soldiers come and see me and although I'll listen to them, I'll tell them when I've heard them to go through the correct chain of command" (p. 43).

While the British RSM maintains some contact and listens to his soldiers, he also redirects their issues to the chain of command. The account says nothing about whether such contacts result in any informal problem-solving or further informal communication to address the issues raised.

Perhaps rooted in differences in national and military culture, Danish CSELs operate through a more relational and collegial mode of influence. Where social distance is transgressed with caution in the British Army in Kirke's account, Danish CSELs see their role expectations differently. Danish CSELs foreground social embeddedness, trust, and approachability: "They can always say to me whatever occurs to them. […] That is what I achieve by being visible" (Battalion command sergeant major, #2), and "It is not the position. It is Jack! That is important" (High-level CSEL, #38). Based on their

[8] The sergeants' mess, in Kirke's account of the British Army, serves as a socially significant space for informal exchange among NCOs, while also reinforcing hierarchical boundaries. Kirke shows how it enables the RSM to handle some matters informally, even as expectations of social distance, especially for those in senior positions, shape interactions.

accounts, Danish CSELs appear to view social distance, unapproachability, and failure to build relational trust as contrary to good leadership practice, as exemplified by a Danish RSM: "I could not have done this if I had just been a cold bastard coming out shouting, 'The boss has said …'" (#41).

In summary, the balance between relational accessibility, perceived helpfulness or usefulness to soldiers, and distance and official decorum in expected role behavior and leadership style for CSELs seems to differ between these armies and may represent broader differences between Danish and Anglo-American military traditions. However, differences in role expectations regarding decorum and leadership styles do not necessarily entail that the underlying social mechanisms for how CSELs gain authority with commanders and soldiers differ. Kirke does not explore how British CSELs gain or lose authority in the British Army. It is possible that the described differences in decorum and leadership style are only differences in the role expectations for what constitutes credible CSEL behavior in the eyes of their audiences, and what thus warrants authorization and de-authorization.

Further Perspectives

Command Teams and Collective Command

This section discusses the dissertation's findings in relation to the contested concept of *collective command*, primarily advanced by King (2019, 2020). King finds that mission management has become increasingly collective in divisional headquarters, a development driven by growing battlefield complexity. This dissertation extends King's work on how command is practiced by examining command teams in the Danish Army, the command dyad being the smallest unit in which command can assume collective forms. While it finds extensive collective dynamics in command teams' organizationally oriented focus, the dissertation does not find that the employment of command teams entails a shift to collective command. Rather, command team practices function through a combination of individual and collective logics and dynamics, governed by the institutional understanding of supreme individual command authority.

The concept of command is often subdivided into command, management, and leadership (Grint, 2005; A. King, 2019; Okros, 2012), each of which can operate through individual, collective, or hybrid dynamics. Though different studies vary slightly, the subdivisions are generally defined as follows: 1) command refers to strategic decision-making and setting overall direction and mission; 2) management concerns the execution of that direction within the formal structure; and 3) leadership addresses the social system that motivates

the organization to pursue the overall direction. These distinctions are useful when exploring individual and collective dynamics in military command.

Command as the concentration of structurally ascribed formal authority and responsibility in commanders is widely accepted in both literature and practice (Freedman, 2020, 2022; A. King, 2015; Okros, 2012). However, when examining how command is enacted, it becomes clear that commanders do not operate in isolation and that interactions between commanders, their staff, their deputies, their CSELs, and trusted sparring partners are of key importance (A. King, 2020). King's analysis of the divisional level did not challenge the extensive authorization of individual commanders, but he identified a qualitative shift toward collectivity in the twenty-first century in mission management concerned with mission execution. King links this development to increasing spatial, temporal, and technological spans of control, professionalization of staff, and larger headquarters as an adaptation to increased battlefield complexity (King, 2019, p. 18). However, while King labels this "collective command," it may be better described as collective mission management (Sjøgren, 2022).

Although King focused on decision-making, he found that much command activity centers on the critical preceding step of "defining complex situations [and] identifying possible courses of action" (A. King, 2020, p. 116) – i.e., sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Similarly, this study finds that shared sensemaking and creating meaning from the flux of unfolding organizational events are the main activities within the Danish Army's command teams. Commanders and CSELs continuously build shared organizational understandings and determine possible courses of action based on their differences in professional experience, educational backgrounds, and organizational interfaces.

As the sensemaking activities in the command team often lead to agreements on a way forward, and as commanders consult their CSELs on most organizational decisions, this study confirms that sensemaking and, to some degree, decision-making have collective characteristics. In other words, the executive command function of strategic decision-making in the context of command teams has extensive collective dynamics. However, these collective processes occur within an institutional understanding of supreme individual command authority that affirms command as an individual endeavor. Strategic decision-making remains seen as the formal prerogative of the commander, and this understanding frames the collective aspects of command team practice. Accordingly, this study does not suggest that command teams entail a shift from individual to collective command, but rather that individual and collective logics are deeply intertwined.

While King found collectivization of mission management driven by operational demands, the collective aspects of the Danish command team practice are primarily directed at organizational leadership. Command teams are doctrinally co-located on the battlefield, but, especially at higher levels, commanders do not see CSELs as valuable sparring partners for tactical decisions. This is often attributed to differences in education and professional training. If CSELs are consulted operationally, it is typically related to internal concerns, such as the morale of their own forces. Hence, in operational contexts, command team influence diminishes, and decision-making becomes more individualized. This tendency diverges from accounts of collective command as an adaptive response to battlefield complexity (A. King, 2019, 2020; A. C. King, 2017; McChrystal, 2017; McChrystal et al., 2015). However, operational command may take collective forms outside the command teams studied here.

The Danish Army's command team practices are primarily oriented toward internal organizational leadership, especially concerning the human dimension: cohesion, morale, and the development of soldiers as the unit's human capital. In line with this focus and given CSELs' key role in translating and communicating the commander's intent, the leadership sub-domain also exhibits important collective dynamics. These practices underscore that while command team work is grounded in individual authority, it often relies on collective processes to make that authority effective.

No Social Closure?

This dissertation presents a perhaps surprisingly harmonious account of the implementation of the command team concept and how CSELS are authorized beyond their chain of command position and, in some instances, beyond their sub-commanders. As the dominant perspective in the sociology of professions sees claims of professionalism and expertise as mere instruments in profession-level power struggles for privileges and resources between occupational groups (Brænder, 2021; Burk, 2005), it may seem surprising that commanders authorize senior NCOs above more junior officers rather than protect the interests of the officer corps. The concepts of social closure (Abbot, 1988; Weeden, 2002) or exclusionary closure (Saks, 2012) would predict that the officer profession would act to protect its institutional status and monopoly over jurisdiction and decision-making. However, Danish army officers seemingly willingly share some of their authority with their CSELs.

A possible explanation is that commanders have higher-ranking motivations than those related to the collective standing of the officer corps and professional identity. The findings from this dissertation suggest that commanders' chances of succeeding in their command position increase with a loyal, competent, and authorized CSEL by their side. Officers only occupy command

positions for a fraction of their career, and each command stint is a critical opportunity to prove their ability to command at higher levels.

If loyal and competent CSELs reinforce commanders' authority and extend their influence throughout the unit when they invest their personal credibility in backing them, then sharing authority with their CSELs likely increases commanders' chances of success. Given this dynamic, it would be counterproductive for commanders to prioritize their officer identity at the expense of the partnership with their CSELs.

This dynamic extends Dandeker and Yden's (2022) argument that senior NCOs enable commanders' upward career trajectories. Where their "consumer and producer" model centers on how NCOs' domain-specific understanding is interjected into commanders' decision-making, this dissertation's findings contribute by elucidating how the command team relationship can boost commanders' influence and reach organizationally.

Practical Implications

This section addresses findings that may be of practical value in the continued use, institutionalization, and potential evolution of the army's application of the command team and CSEL concepts.

The command team concept seems least successful at the company level due to intense and sometimes contradictory role demands and task portfolios for company sergeants. This level is junior commanders' and their NCO counterparts' first exposure to co-leadership and the command team concept.[9] In light of Reid and Karambayya's (2015) finding that a history of negative experiences in co-leadership casts a shadow on subsequent relationships, and Edwards et al.'s (2014) point that one's first exposure to the officer-NCO relationship sets expectations for later partnerships, the army must be aware of the potential negative ramifications of issues at the company level.

Command teams broadly report high levels of trust and confidentiality, and this milieu is necessary for open-ended sensemaking, where both parties can share doubts and explore ideas freely. This aligns with the co-leadership literature, which finds trust and confidentiality to be essential elements of the relationship (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2002; Gronn, 2002; S. A. Miles & Watkins, 2007). It also aligns with the increased awareness of psychological safety (A. C. Edmondson & Lei, 2014) and its importance for learning and innovation, mistake tolerance, and engagement, which are all important for command team effectiveness. The centrality of trust and confidentiality raises the

[9] Officers and NCOs also experience this collaboration at the platoon level, but this is not officially characterized as a command team, and the platoon level is different because the platoon sergeant is part of the chain of command.

question of how the army can support such relationships to help trust take root, and what to do in cases where it does not.

Command teams spend significant time tête-à-tête informally, in large part as a by-product of the significant time spent together in vehicles to and from external representation, where they continuously develop a shared understanding of organizational events. Physical co-location out of functional necessity is a strong predictor for solid informal relationships to emerge between military leaders across categories (Kirke, 2009, 41-42). This aligns with the co-leadership literature's findings on how trust and confidentiality develop: regular communication that resolves problems (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2002), reflection and listening (Macneill et al., 2012), keeping disagreements within the dyad (Reid & Karambayya, 2009), and attention to the organization of the dyad (Reid & Karambayya, 2015). Since public conflict and differing viewpoints about organizational issues are significant concerns, possessing a collaborative work style and effective negotiating skills (Reid & Karambayya, 2009), as well as a proven ability to establish trust (Reid & Karambayya, 2015), are important characteristics in identifying command team candidates.

Given that many high-quality dyadic relationships emerge from shared time during leadership tasks, preparation and education programs could potentially benefit from co-leaders attending together, providing opportunities to build relationships while developing and aligning their leadership outlook.

The relational underpinnings of CSELs' authority and leadership prompt the question of how future CSELs should be prepared to function in command teams and what profiles to select. The centrality of their relational work and their ability to socially navigate the sometimes ambiguous boundaries of their role suggests that it is important to develop personal and relational skills among NCOs. This could involve training programs focused on communication, relationship-building, and influence strategies, balanced by a thorough understanding of the army's formal structure, so that relational leadership remains supportive rather than challenging the chain of command.

A more fundamental question is to clarify the core competencies of CSELs and the significance of military expertise and experience *vis-à-vis* relational skills and general leadership abilities. Becoming a member of a command team entails a shift to organizational leadership from NCOs' formative experiences as specialist leaders.

One regiment has already engaged in this issue and split its NCO talent pipeline into a specialist and a leadership route. While personal qualities and relational skills may be central, earlier studies suggest that clout in the informal organization is also closely related to "having paid one's dues" and experiences in combat that signal experience-based, reality-proven expertise (Jaffe, 1984; Kirke, 2009).

Summary

In 2018, the Danish Army followed a development in major Anglo-Saxon NATO countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, and began implementing command teams as a leadership model. Doctrinally, command teams establish loyalty-based leadership dyads between commanders and Command Senior Enlisted Leaders (CSELs) at all levels of command.

Although the leadership model has been employed for decades in these countries, it has not been the subject of empirical academic research. Something similar applies to the NCO corps, who are assigned a central role in the military through both research literature and the practitioners' use of the metaphor "the NCOs are the backbone of the Army," but who also have played a peripheral role in military sociology. This is mainly due to the historical focus on the officer corps in conceptualizations of military professionalism. As a result, we know little about how command teams function in practice and how NCOs participate in organizational leadership, beyond their well-established roles as direct leaders of soldiers, as links between officers' plans and operational execution, and as experts in the craft of soldiering. Given that NCOs are increasingly highlighted as central to modern military leadership and are more often involved in organizational and strategic leadership, and considering that Western militaries face large-scale expansion and transformation, there is a need for new knowledge in this area.

The dissertation takes as its starting point the conceptual tensions and ambiguities found in NATO doctrine descriptions of command teams and the CSEL function. While commanders are constituted through formal positional authority, CSMs are circularly described as working from positions of "leadership and influence." Furthermore, the functioning of command teams is depicted through a combination of individual and collective logics, encompassing both shared leadership responsibility and individual command authority. Based on the lack of understanding regarding how CSMs are organizationally authorized and how individual and collective dynamics interplay within Army command team practices, the dissertation explores the research question: "How are command teams and the CSEL function enacted as leadership practices in the Danish Army?"

The overarching research question is addressed through a qualitative methodology and based on extensive fieldwork. Three studies collectively illuminate different dimensions of the leadership practices. The empirical material consists primarily of 45 interviews with officers and CSELs across all

hierarchical levels and types of units, supported by one month of fieldwork with a deployed battalion.

Study A examines the organizational authorization of CSMs and finds that they are authorized relationally through a dual process: partly as extensions of their commanders' authority, and partly as leaders in their own right, locally and relationally authorized through social contracts with the unit's leaders and soldiers. This dual authorization enables a more relational leadership function that can complement the formal structure, but that also results in ambiguity regarding the structural status of the role.

Study B investigates the internal interaction between commanders and CSELs within command teams. The study finds that command teams function predominantly as forums for collective sensemaking, where the members continuously develop shared understandings of their units and environments. This process of sensemaking can extend into shared decision-making, although practitioners see decision-making through an understanding of supreme, individual command authority. The study thus shows how command team practices function through the integration of individual and collective logics and processes.

Study C examines how command teams engage the formal and informal army organization. The study finds that while commanders primarily utilize the chain of command, CSMs primarily engage the informal organization centered on the unit's NCO corps. This structure allows CSELs to channel perceptions from the informal organization, which may not be transmitted through formal channels, into formal decision-making processes. Additionally, CSELs monitor the informal sensemaking among soldiers and interject background information and clarifications when informal sensemaking diverges from the formal rationale for decisions.

In sum, the dissertation shows that the army's command team practices create a differentiated leadership system, where commanders' formal authority and CSMs' relational authority engage different organizational spheres, and where these are integrated through the command team relationship. The findings demonstrate how relational dynamics and their connection to the formal structure are crucial for understanding military leadership and professionalism within the context of army command team practices.

Finally, the dissertation discusses the role of the NCOs in organizational leadership, the potential of transferability of the findings to other armies, and how the findings are likely influenced by Denmark's relatively egalitarian and informal military culture. Regarding the concept of collective command, the findings confirm clear collective elements in the command practices, while showing that these operate within a framework of supreme, individual command authority.

Dansk Resumé

I 2018 fulgte den danske Hær udviklingen fra store, angelsaksiske NATO-lande som USA, Storbritannien og Canada og påbegyndte implementeringen af command teams som ledelsesform. Doktrinært etablerer command teams loyalitetsbaserede lederdyader mellem chefer og enhedsbefalingsmænd i spidsen for enheder på alle niveauer.

Selvom ledelsesformen har været anvendt i årtier i blandt andet de nævnte NATO-lande, har den aldrig været undersøgt forskningsmæssigt. Noget lignende gør sig gældende for befalingsmandskorpset, som på den ene side tilskrives central betydning gennem forskningslitteraturen og praktikeres anvendelse af metaforen "befalingsmændene udgør hærens rygrad", men på den anden side har haft en perifer rolle i militærsociologien. Det skyldes, at denne litteratur historisk har fokuseret på officerskorpset i sine konceptualiseringer af militær professionalisme. Resultatet er, at vi både ved lidt om, hvordan command teams fungerer i praksis, og hvordan befalingsmænd indgår i organisatorisk ledelse – ud over deres veletablerede roller som direkte ledere af soldater, som bindeled mellem officerskorpsets planer og den konkrete udførelse, og som eksperter i soldaterhåndværket. I lyset af, at befalingsmænd i stigende grad fremhæves som afgørende for moderne militær ledelse og i større udstrækning inddrages i organisatorisk og strategisk ledelse, samt at vestlige militære styrker står over for store forandringer og udvidelser, er der behov for ny viden på området.

Afhandlingens fokus tager udgangspunkt i de konceptuelle spændinger og utydeligheder, der findes i beskrivelserne af command teams og enhedsbefalingsmandsfunktionen i NATO-doktriner. Hvor chefvirket er konstitueret af formel positionsautoritet, beskrives enhedsbefalingsmænd på en cirkulær måde som ledere, der virker gennem 'lederskab og indflydelse'. Hertil kommer, at command team virket beskrives med en blanding af individuelle og kollektive logikker, hvor både delt ledelsesansvar og individuelt chefvirke fremhæves. Med udgangspunkt i uklarhederne om, hvordan enhedsbefalingsmænd autoriseres organisatorisk, samt hvordan individuelle og kollektive dynamikker og logikker spiller sammen i hærens command team-praksisser, undersøger afhandlingen spørgsmålet: "Hvordan realiseres command teams og enhedsbefalingsmandsfunktionen som ledelsespraksisser i den danske hær?".

Det overordnede forskningsspørgsmål undersøges med kvalitativ metode og på baggrund af et omfattende feltarbejde. Tre studier belyser tilsammen forskellige dimensioner af ledelsespraksis. Datamaterialet udgøres hovedsageligt af 45 interviews med officerer og enhedsbefalingsmænd på tværs af

niveauer og typer af enheder understøttet af en måneds feltarbejde ved en udsendt bataljon.

Studie A undersøger den organisatoriske autorisering af enhedsbefalingsmænd og finder, at de autoriseres relationelt gennem en dobbelt proces: dels som forlængelser af deres chefers autoritet, dels som ledere i egen ret, hvor de lokalt og relationelt autoriseres gennem sociale kontrakter med enhedens ledere og soldater. Denne dobbelte autorisering muliggør en mere relationel ledelsesfunktion, som kan komplementere den formelle ledelsesstruktur, men medfører samtidig, at funktionens strukturelle status ofte fremstår uklar.

Studie B undersøger det interne samspil mellem chefer og enhedsbefalingsmænd i command teams og viser, at command teams i høj grad fungerer som fora for meningsskabelse, hvor medlemmerne sammen skaber en fælles forståelse af deres enheder og omgivelser. Meningsskabelsen kan fortsætte i fælles beslutningstagning, men samtidig forstår praktikerne beslutninger som et individuelt chefforetagende. Således viser studiet, at command teams virker gennem tæt integrerede individuelle og kollektive logikker og processer.

Studie C undersøger, hvordan command teams engagerer den formelle og uformelle hærorganisation. Studiet finder, at chefer primært anvender den formelle kommandovej, mens enhedsbefalingsmænd engagerer den uformelle organisation centreret omkring enhedernes befalingsmandskorps. Denne struktur muliggør, at enhedsbefalingsmænd kan bringe opfattelser fra den uformelle organisation – som ikke nødvendigvis kommunikeres gennem den formelle kommandovej – ind i de formelle beslutningsprocesser. Gennem deres færden blandt soldaterne monitorerer enhedsbefalingsmænd desuden den uformelle meningsskabelse og bidrager med baggrundsviden og præciseringer, når den uformelle forståelse er præget af frustrationer eller afviger fra de faktiske beslutningsgrundlag.

Samlet viser afhandlingen, at hærens command team praksisser skaber et differentieret ledelsessystem, hvor chefernes formelle autoritet og enhedsbefalingsmændenes relationelle autoritet engagerer forskellige sfærer i organisationen, og hvor disse integreres gennem command team relationen. Fundene viser, hvordan relationelle dynamikker og deres forbindelse til den formelle struktur er afgørende for at forstå militær ledelse og professionalisme i konteksten af hærens command team-praksisser.

Afslutningsvis diskuterer afhandlingen befalingsmandskorpsets funktioner i organisatorisk ledelse, mulighederne for overførsel af fundene til andre militære organisationer, samt hvordan de sandsynligvis er formet af den danske hærs relativt egalitære og uformelle kultur. I forhold til begrebet collective command bekræfter afhandlingen, at der er kollektive aspekter i commandpraksis, men viser samtidig, hvordan disse aspekter virker inden for en ramme af individuelt, formelt chefvirke.

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Appendices

Interview Participant Overview

Function	Combat Arms	Combat Support & Logistics	Strategic/ Operational roles
Army Commander			1
Command Sergeant Major of the Army			1
Brigade Commander			2
Brigade Commander Sergeant Major			2
Regimental Commander		1	
Regimental Deputy Commander		1	
Regimental Sergeant Major		1	
Battalion Commander	2	2	
Battalion Deputy Commander	2	1	
Battalion Sergeant Major	3	2	
Battalion Staff Officer	2		
Battalion Staff NCO	1		
Company Commander	4	1	
Company Deputy Commander	4		
Company First Sergeant	5	2	
Company NCO	1	1	
Platoon Commanders		2	
International Strategic-Level Participants (only used for contextualization)			
NATO former strategic-level commanders			2
NATO former strategic-level CSEL			1
US former strategic-level CSEL			1

Interview Guide, Commander

Introduction and Briefing

1. Is it okay if I record this interview?
2. This PhD project is a collaboration between The Danish Defense College and Aarhus University. The aim is to investigate how the command team concept is enacted as a leadership practice in the Army, how it interacts with formal authority, and what it means for officers and NCOs as professional roles. As an industrial PhD, I shall produce knowledge for use in our leadership educational programs and contribute to the academic literature.
3. I am conducting this research in my capacity as a researcher and therefore adhere to research ethics, including striving for neutrality. My background as an NCO in the Army gives me a basic understanding of the organization.
    - The questions are not meant normative; they are intended to uncover your understanding.
    - You may find some of the questions quite similar.
    - The interview is semi-structured.
4. I lay out the planned themes for the interview
5. I repeat our agreements
    - Would you prefer to remain anonymous?
    - If you say something you do not want me to use, just let me know.
    - Do you consent to me using your answers for research purposes?
6. Please ask me to repeat any question that is unclear.

Generic Probes

- Can you elaborate on that?
- Can you think of an example? Is it always like that?
- Am I understanding you correctly when I say…?
- Why did/does this happen?
- What effects does it have?
- Why do you think it's good/bad/right/wrong?
- What would the ideal approach or behavior look like?

Debriefing

- Is there anything you'd like to add?
- I will summarize my main impressions from the interview.
- I'll repeat the agreements we made.

Background Information

- Name, age, rank, role, career overview.
- How would you describe the brigade/regiment/battalion/company as a unit type?
- How would you describe your role as xxx?

Theme 1: Your Leadership Practice

- How do you use the command team (CT) in leading your regiment?
  - In what types of tasks do you involve your CSEL?
  - Organizational?
  - Decision-making?
- Do your main tasks and the CT's main tasks overlap?
- Is the command team a decision-making forum or a forum for information-sharing?
- What do the two roles – officers and NCOs – contribute to the CT?
- What does it mean that formal authority lies solely with the officer?
- What role does trust play in your CT collaboration?
  - What builds mutual trust? Can CTs function without trust?
- What does a model CT look like?
- What has guided or shaped the way you use CT?
- Has the introduction of CTs changed how you lead?
- When is leadership shared, and when is it individual?

Theme 2: The CSEL

- How would you describe your cooperation with your CSEL vs. your XO or Deputy?
- How would you describe the CSEL's task and position in the regiment?
  - What are the most important skills and attributes, both professional and personal?
- Where does the CSEL fit in the chain of command?
- What is the foundation of the CSEL's authority?
  - How does the CSEL gain authority? Did you have to do anything early on to ensure leadership space for the CSEL?
- Who is the CSEL meant to influence?
- Do you use the CSEL to work parallel to the formal chain of command?
- How does the CSEL's role change between operational and day-to-day contexts?
- How well is your CSEL trained for this role, given that this level of leadership is far removed from basic soldiering?
- What does it take to succeed as a CSEL?
- Some talk about the "NCO network" or "NCO chain." Does that exist? What does the NCO network contribute that the chain of command cannot? What are

the similarities and differences between the network and the chain of command? How do you maintain a feel for the organization?

Theme 3: Command Teams in General in the Army

- What do you see as the main differences between the old and new leadership practices?
- What do you think is the purpose of implementing CTs in the army?
  - What experiences, insights, or problems does the strategy build on?
- What leadership outcomes is the CT concept supposed to achieve?
- How are the conditions for the concept to function in the army?
- Is the concept equally suited for operational and administrative leadership?
- Some literature describes 21st-century warfare as more complex, e.g., multi-domain operations. What's your take on this? How does this relate to the CT concept?

Training and Retention:

- How far has the army come in ensuring the NCO corps has the skills to take on more responsibility?

Theme 4: Roles and Values of Officers and NCOs

- Why did you become an officer?
- What do you want to stand for as an officer?
- What is an officer's most important area of expertise?
- What is an NCO's most important area of expertise?
- Does the CT concept change what it means to be an officer or NCO in the Danish Army?
- From an officer's perspective, what value does the CT concept offer?

Theme 5: Ukraine

- Ukraine's effectiveness has surprised many. Beyond morale, how do you see differences in Russian vs. Ukrainian command philosophies? What role does the NCO corps play in these structures?