

How aims of ‘looking good’ may limit the possibilities of ‘being good’: The case of the Swedish Police

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Abstract

The expression ‘being good or looking good’ not only highlights a tension between presented images of how an organisation works and how it actually works, but also indicates that an aim of looking good can have a negative impact on how an organisation will work and evolve. In fact, when an organisation has a strong desire to ‘look good’ there is a risk that significant problems will be hidden or mitigated, and therefore remain undealt with. Inquiries, of different types, and research too, can contribute to creating a good impression of an organisation, and can be part of an organisation’s strategy for image promotion. In this paper we address a research gap by exploring how organisational image promotion may form, influence and be a prerequisite for how research and inquiries are carried out and presented, and how pressure to build a good image of an organisation affects the possibilities to develop that organisation. Through the use of several examples we aim to demonstrate various outcomes and dilemmas both for researchers carrying out research in an organisation which puts great effort into image promotion and for organisations with such a wish. The organisation in focus for this paper is the Swedish Police.

A proposed problem

Over the past decades organisational research has shown how legitimacy work is fundamental in public and private institutions (e.g. Alvesson, 2013b; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977). The discourse of ‘value-based organisations’ has increased the significance of value branding and value work in public institutions (Krause-Jensen, 2011). Among other

things, Brunsson (1993) argues that in public organisations a higher priority is given to numbers rather than the reality behind them. The term ‘window dressing’ has thus been used by scholars to visualise and explain the institutional image or organisational brand as communicated in public. As the term suggests, critics argue that the focus on window dressing downplays the actual performance of an organisation, in favour of rhetoric and strategic value branding of the organisation (e.g. Alvesson, 2013a; 2013b). The increasing employment of communicators in the public sector is an effect of this (Forsell & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2014). In the short term the legitimacy and façade building are valuable and important for protecting an organisational brand. However, since brand value is connected to reputation and trust we find it important to also understand potential problematic consequences and dilemmas of image-promoting practices. While much organisational research has had an emphasis on how branding leads to positive value for an organisation (cf. Rennstam, 2013), we aim to address a scarcer field of research – the negative outcomes of organisational image promotion.

To contribute to an understanding of the potential paradox of organisational image promotion in relation to organisational functioning, we turn to the Swedish Police. As in other public institutions, scholars point at the tendency in the Swedish Police to prioritise political strategies in order to create a good reputation rather than addressing institutional obstacles and problems (Holgersson, 2014; 2015; Rennstam, 2013). This phenomenon has been observed in other police organisations, such as the New York Police Department (Eterno & Silverman, 2012). Furthermore, the desire to promote a good image may also influence the relationship between an organisation and the research community and can create dilemmas when conducting research (Holgersson, 2015; Holgersson & Melin, 2015). In this paper we will describe how organisational image promotion may form, influence and be a prerequisite for how research and inquiries are conducted, presented and received. We will highlight how research that contributes to an aim of ‘looking good’ in a short-term perspective can be negative for an organisation’s development into ‘being good’ and therefore negative for ‘looking good’ in a long-term perspective.

Method, material and context

In this section we outline the method and data used in the analysis. We begin with some notes on the context of the organisation under study.

The Swedish Police

The Swedish Police has 28,000 employees, of which about 20,000 are police officers. In 2015 the Swedish Police Authority began a major reorganisation in which 21 counties were restructured into one national police service. The National Police Commissioner formulated a policy in which he made it clear that the aim of the Police's communication work is to strengthen the brand (Polisen, 2015).

For a decade the police had a research unit at the National Police Academy (NPA). However, during the late 1990s this unit was closed down after a resolution from the National Police Commissioner. It was also resolved that research was no longer to be conducted within the NPA. Employees belonging to this unit were instead supposed to work at the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet, BRÅ). A survey has shown that, compared to other professions, the police are the least interested in research and the value given in that survey was remarkably low (Brante, Johnsson, Olofsson & Svensson, 2015).

More than 10 years after the research unit was closed down the Swedish Government requested that the police improve their capability to conduct evaluations. An independent evaluation function at the Swedish Police was established with the task of examining and guaranteeing the quality of the published research. One purpose was to improve police reporting to both the Swedish government and citizens. Another purpose was to help transform the police into a learning organisation and to increase police effectiveness and efficiency. However, top-ranking commanders interfered with the work of the independent evaluation unit. The senior researcher who was in charge of the evaluation unit resigned in protest and the board fell apart when the board members no longer wanted to be part of it (Knutsson, 2015).

Material

We will explore organisational image promotion with a variety of empirical examples and by using data triangulation. Primarily, we will use a number of studies of, and investigations into, the Swedish Police that have been conducted by a number of researchers, including the authors. As one part, we will study the reception of these studies using official and unofficial statements and media reports. This means that we will also use official statements from the police's and other agencies' webpages as empirical data. We have also used public documents from agencies/government bodies. Additionally, we will account for methodological

considerations and field notes when researching the police. This includes a number of formal (such as emails) and informal (oral) exchanges between researchers, and between the police organisation and researchers. In addition, we have conducted formal semi-structured interviews to increase validation in comparison of field notes. In total, we have interviewed six (A-F) researchers about their experiences of researching the Swedish Police. We also have email correspondence concerning the matter with three researchers (G-I). All these nine researchers have extensive and long postdoctoral research experience within this field. Two researchers have declined participation and interviews with us, based on reasons that are symptomatic with the claims we are making in this paper. Seven additional interviews were conducted with present or former employees of other agencies that work in close relation to the police; three former employees (J-L) at Brottsförebyggande Rådet (BRÅ), and two employees at Statskontoret (M-N) and two out of four researchers in a Statskontoret reference group (O-P) agreed to be interviewed.

Ethical considerations

One part of the empirical data is our own methodological considerations and field notes of researching the field. As such, they have been part of various studies over twenty and seven years respectively and form a meta-reflexive content of researching the police. This includes conversations with actors in the field, both within the police and other researchers. Thus, informed consent to use these accounts has not been requested and/or even been possible, which can be seen as a lack of ethical procedure. Although we share this criticism, we also argue that these accounts from the field are significant for 1) the problem identification and formulation of this paper, 2) the researchers' methodology, and 3) conducting and analysing critical research of structures and systems in agencies – since these structures are seldom explicit and accessible for systematic research. Concerning the public documents, we have not asked for informed consent since they are public, but they are anonymised. However, all interviewed informants have been informed about the purpose and given their consent. All informants have been offered the opportunity to read through and revise their statements, and have given consent for publication. In many circumstances, details have been omitted to ensure confidentiality. This includes the references to many reports conducted by researchers, which would reveal the identity of those researchers who wish to remain anonymous.

Method for analysis

We use a reflexive research approach when analysing and categorising the empirical data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A wide range and type of empirical data is used to analyse how organisational image promotion may form, influence and be a prerequisite for how reports are *conducted, presented* and *received*. To understand how image promotion influences how studies and inquiries are *conducted* and *presented*, we turn to interviews as well as a large body of our own field notes and field conversations with researchers and other actors over years of research on the police. The empirical data has been categorised in dominating themes, with the purpose of highlighting similarities and differences in interviewees' notions. However, the data shows a high degree of unanimity with very few conflicting notions. Our analysis of the *reception* of various reports is based on the content of the reports in relation to 1) statements (official and unofficial) from the police, 2) statements (official and unofficial) from and interviews with researchers, and 3) media reports.

Finally, we take into consideration the structural conditions within and actions from the police organisation, in order to outline and problematise image-promoting practices, especially when researching the police. In this approach, we acknowledge both the research interests of scholars and the organisation's interest in a short and long-term perspective. To understand organisational image-promoting practices within the police we focus on theories of branding and legitimacy work in organisations.

Theoretical framework

Legitimacy work and branding plays a significant part in organisational management and functions in several ways (e.g. Alvesson, 2013b; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Holgersson, 2013, 2014; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Rennstam, 2013). These theories can be used to explain a driving force to 'look good'. Legitimacy activities can also be especially complex in public organisations that 'have a political dimension inside; but there is also a political dimension outside [...] with strong connections to the work practices within. In both dimensions, legitimacy is an important factor' (Holgersson & Melin, 2015, p. 14. See also Mintzberg, 1985).

However, an organisation's strong attempts to 'look good' run the risk of creating an atmosphere where individuals may falsely believe that their primary responsibility is to save face for the organisation by covering up wrongdoing (Goffman, 1956). It is important to identify and describe problems in order to improve organisational effectiveness and efficiency

(e.g. Miceli, Near & Schwenk, 1991), but a fear of voicing criticism (Shepherd, Patzelt, Williams & Warnecke, 2014) and information gatekeepers (Bouhnik & Giat, 2015) might lead to some information being misleading or not reaching decision makers. There are a great number of examples from organisations indicating that a large focus on quantitative data generated by ICT (information communication technology) can cause dysfunctional behaviours in organisations (Lapsley, 2009; Speklé & Verbeeten, 2014) and that manipulation of numbers can create a wrong or misleading basis for decisions (Alvesson, 2013b; Eterno & Silverman, 2012; Holgersson, 2015).

Research on the Swedish Police argues that this organisation is not a learning organisation, for example when it comes to appreciating the identifying of problems (Andersson-Arntén, 2013). Others report on a widespread fear of reprisals among police employees, which also affects the willingness to address problems in the organisation (Holgersson, forthcoming; Wieslander, 2016; forthcoming). These features affect how police work is communicated both internally and externally. Several studies put forward how the work of Swedish Police communication has been misleading, and sometimes even directly wrong, in its reporting, which in turn puts the police in a more positive light (Holgersson, 2013; 2014, Rostami, Melde & Holgersson, 2014). This also concerns data in annual reports, for example where negative results have been concealed (Holgersson, 2014; RRV, 2016). The Swedish Police have been identified as applying and using more than twenty different communication strategies to deflect criticism and to put forward positive messages. One of these strategies is to refer to ongoing or forthcoming inquiries when the police are discredited regarding some matter (Holgersson, 2014).

Researching the Swedish Police

We will, through a number of examples, show how researchers and studies of policing can be part of the police's image-promoting strategies and we will describe what can happen if a researcher presents results that are not in line with the authorities' agenda of 'looking good'. We will also illustrate how both researchers and research studies are used in argumentations to sustain or change organisational structures or the way of working in a particular direction – regardless of whether the argument is supported by the research findings. Both short-term and long-term outcomes will be discussed.

We start this section by presenting three dominating themes regarding the Police's reaction when researchers present critical or inconvenient results about the police. These

themes emerged in interviews with researchers with long experience in the field. Then we will describe how the Brottsförebyggande rådet – BRÅ (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention) and Statskontoret (The Swedish Agency for Public Management) contribute to the police ambition of ‘looking good’. It is important to note that we do not claim that these two agencies always avoid presenting information which is negative for the police brand. It is for example possible to find strong criticism of the police in BRÅ reports, but significant criticism is left out in press releases and in the police’s official interpretation and communication of those reports. Finally we will with two short and one longer example to exemplify how the aim of ‘looking good’ may limit the possibilities of ‘being good’.

The aim of ‘looking good’ and reactions towards research

The Swedish Police use more effort and resources to ‘look good’ than before (Forsell & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2014; Holgersson, 2014). One researcher (A), who has conducted research within the Swedish Police for 40 years states that the prospects of conducting research within the Swedish police have worsened in recent years. Other researchers have also, during interviews, pointed at the problem of how a strong and growing aim of ‘looking good’ affects the conditions for doing research. Researcher (B):

After the reorganisation it became clear that the management do not want other research than that commissioned by the organisation itself. Media put pressure on the police and my feeling is that you don’t want problematic research that needs to be addressed and dealt with. As there is no scientific basis for the reorganisation it becomes even more awkward to carry out research about it, as it would – in a very obvious and clear way – reveal the inherent defects.

And researcher (C):

The secrecy inherent in criminal investigations and the confidentiality necessary for certain types of police work have come together to form a general atmosphere of silence. The police organisation has instead obtained an army of communicators whose purpose is not to give an objective picture of policing but to present police work in the best possible light.

One of the authors of this paper has, over 20 years of research, written a number of reports about the Swedish Police that have identified problems and suggested solutions. The reaction from the police towards the research has been multifaceted and it is possible to highlight both

positive and negative consequences (Holgersson, 2015). Holgersson draws the same conclusion as researcher (G) that a factor influencing the way research is received is whether or not the researcher has attempted to understand the complex situations affecting police work. One significant factor influencing reactions is whether the research challenges the organisation's aim of 'looking good'. If so, it can result in a great deal of negative action by police management against the researcher (Holgersson, 2015). Several other scholars with extensive experience of researching the police have drawn similar conclusions concerning the ability to conduct critical research. Researcher (B) stated that:

Personally, I have never had any problems with negative reactions concerning my research results. But I know colleagues that have been exposed to it /.../. It is not that these researchers have done anything wrong, they have just addressed a question that is not appreciated. /.../ The research I have conducted has been harmless and I would take a step back from undertaking any research that risked causing negative reactions within the police.

Both researchers (B and C) have not experienced personal difficulties as a result of their own research, but they have noted that other researchers have run into problems. Researcher C:

Instead of the police appreciating criticism as a welcome contribution they have met it with silence, critics have been questioned – even hounded, and research results have been rejected.

Another researcher (D) relayed experiences of going from being appreciated to being a pariah when reporting critical results within and about the police and how reporting results that may harm the brand is unpopular and costly:

If scholars state that the police are highly accepting of critical research they either have a lack of insight or they state this as it will have an effect on their own chances of gaining further access within the police.

This researcher continues to explain that it is possible to have a positive dialogue with a chief who agrees with the results, but who acts differently when the results have been published and have to be responded to in public:

When results are presented at the highest managerial level, one-to-one, one can get confirmation of the results, that they are accurate and that the supervisor agrees.

However, when the results are made public, controversy can arise and you can receive criticism and be sanctioned by the same person.

Researcher (D) describes that having a manager listening to research results, being able to present and publish them within the police, can be interpreted by researchers that the police are willing to listen and take action in accordance with the criticism. Researcher (D) has seen that it is possible to present criticism if it does not compel the police to take action in line with the addressed result, and that the police instead could easily brush off the criticism. One notable feature of the combined data sample from all interviewed researchers is that there is a high degree of unanimity with very few conflicting notions. It should be made clear that all these researchers have long postdoctoral experience in researching the police, and these extensive experiences are drawn upon in the interviews in order to both explain their own understanding of researching the police, as well as other researchers' positive perceptions of the same matter. For instance, researcher (D) argues that the researchers expressing a genuine positive opinion about the police's reaction towards their criticism have not witnessed the practical consequences in work practice. Another researcher (E) who has personal experience of getting into bad standing with the highest management within the police concludes that:

If you criticise the police in an informed way you are in trouble in the sense that higher managers put time and effort into questioning you as a person, rather than the issue you have raised.

Others have made similar reflections, and Holgersson's (2015) experience is that it is possible to criticise without any negative outcomes – however – the key issue is how much the result challenges the positive image building. It is especially problematic to publish criticism if this does not support an image that high-ranking officials with great influence have put a lot of effort into creating (Holgersson, 2014; 2015).

Another implication of the police organisation's aim of 'looking good' is put forward by a researcher (E), who also argues that researchers are used in this ambition:

One consequence of the police's interest in creating an attractive image of the operation – that they are on the right path etc. – is that utilise so-called 'expert shopping'. They try to get hold of people who support the things they want supported and might have their own agendas that coincide with the organisation's. They might make use of scientists and other experts. The truth is not a particularly interesting subject for the Police Board.

Similar conclusions are made by Holgersson (2014), whom also interpreted that the police were practicing ‘expert shopping’ when they hired a young researcher (Wieslander) for an inquiry at a time when the organisation was subjected to criticism. Although the purpose was to identify and improve the conversational climate, the researcher’s feeling was that the results would not be appreciated, and, thus, were difficult to present and report. The feeling was based on the results that a code of silence within the police was intertwined with a retaliation culture on several hierarchical levels, results which – due to their content – would even provoke potential retaliation against the researcher when disclosing criticism about the police (Wieslander, 2016). This, of course, put the researcher in a dilemma.

The power to prohibit or make it difficult to conduct research

When researchers apply for external funding it is common that one precondition is an expressed approval from the organisation that will be the focus of the study. This circumstance has in some cases limited the possibility to study the police when management believe that the study may negatively affect the brand. Even if a researcher receives external funds to study an aspect the authority can complicate things or make it impossible to carry out a study. It may be that the authority makes it difficult or restricts the access of data for researchers in a way that obstructs studies. Several researchers (A, B, C and D) describe how the publication of critical research results affects the researcher in many ways, such as ‘decreased chances of receiving further assignments, lack of economic resources for new studies, denial of access to the organisation, as well as personal consequences’ (researcher D). One way for the police to obstruct research can be to reject (or ignore) requests to gain access to personnel or to public records. One of the authors of this article has extensive experience of this:

- The police say that the requested documents do not exist (e.g. Polisen, 2009a) – despite the fact that they have been filed (Polisen, 2008a).
- The police do not respond to requests to access documents (JO, 2016).
- The police delay the disclosure of documents (JO, 2017a), even though the court conclude that the justification to withhold documents was incorrect (Kammarrätten, 2017).
- The police prohibit use of the internal email system or the employee’s time to ask questions about the employees’ ability to voice criticism (email, Feb 2012).

- The police, in violation of the rules and without filing the action, withdraw the researchers' card to access the computer system and police stations (Kjöller, 2016).

To dismiss research as dead or 'bad research' and to obstruct dissemination

For Knutsson (2015), who was appointed by management to organise the previously mentioned evaluation function in the Swedish Police, it became clear how management within the police could act if they wanted to stop criticism. A proposed study was forbidden since the management probably feared it would describe the uniformed police service in a way that would contradict the image presented by management. The Police Chief forbade this senior researcher in charge of the unit to inform the advisory board about the proposed study – a board that was established to guarantee transparency, the quality of the unit's research and to give advice about proposed studies. This prohibition was not only in violation of the purpose of the whole unit, but was also unlawful since it deprived the leader his freedom as a civil servant to speak about the event (Knutsson, 2015). In the interview he recalls:

The board did not want to include a certain research project in the catalogue, but could not give any relevant argument to justify the exclusion. I was also forbidden to talk about this, which means that they deprived me of my freedom of speech. It was a shocking experience. The real reason was probably that they were afraid that the results of the research study would counteract the image of the police work that was presented by the management.

The police can use their opportunities to impede research studies that risk challenging the brand, but the aim of 'looking good' also affects how the police deal with the results of research studies. Both authors of this paper have had the experience that research with results likely to negatively affect the police's image promotion were dismissed as dead or bad research. For example one research report conducted by Holgersson showed that the Swedish Police's way of formulating goals had negative consequences for the work of restricting the use and availability of narcotics (Holgersson, 2007). The National Police Commissioner responded to the presented research study with a news article titled: *'Incorrect criticism about the police's narcotics work'* and stated that the result of the research study was wrong (Polisen, 2007). During a speech to several hundred participants a few months later he said:

This spring, there was a so-called researcher in police science who wrote a report on how the police carry out work with narcotics. It horrified me,

because it was of such poor quality that even an untrained person like myself could see that it just was rubbish. (Polistidningen, 2007)

Another example of how a research study done by Holgersson (2014) was dismissed by police representatives in the national media:

Holgersson's claims are 'insolent'. – He lacks insight. (SvD, 2014b)

All interviewed researchers have stated that the police is not open to criticism. Another researcher (D) describes how police supervisors have adjusted, toned down or even deleted the results of 'problematic' reports. Moreover, this researcher describes how supervisors have argued for reasons why reports should not be printed or published, with such reasons as the results being non-relevant or dead. Researcher (F) describes how the 'National police commissioner did all he could to stop a report and the national police board greatly interfered in the process.'

Considerations by researchers studying the Swedish Police

Due to the conditions described above there can be much at stake from an individual researcher's perspective if one does not act or express oneself in a way that the police management appreciate. Two experienced researchers (not interviewed in this study) that had been helpful with reading and commenting on a draft of the report that was banned by the police officials (Holgersson & Knutsson, 2012) did not want to be officially thanked in the foreword of the research report. One of the researchers wrote in an email that:

/... / I don't want to be dragged into possible conflicts with RPS [SW: Rikspolisstyrelsen. National Police Board] /... / it would not be very smart of me /... / when I'm dependent on external funding. The reality is unfortunately like that. It's not about the quality of the report. N [the other researcher] and I have talked about this and we have the same opinion. (Email, December, 2011)

The other researcher declared similar concerns:

Regarding the foreword. We have discussed the matter and decided not to be mentioned in your foreword. We have connections to RPS and could get into trouble because of the report, in one way or another. Hope you understand our standpoint. (Email December, 2011)

Although the researchers' standpoint not to be mentioned in the foreword was in violation of an academic tradition, their motives were reasonable in light of the organisation's efforts to 'look good' and potential reactions towards criticism.

The examples above illustrate a strategy that might be used to secure one's own image promotion; avoiding research collaboration with researchers who have published critical reports. One other way of handling the dilemma of avoiding critical reports and falling into bad standing is to avoid problematic or sensitive research topics. Another way to receive new assignments, and not fall into bad standing, is to suppress certain facts and conclusions that can be negative for the police brand and instead highlight positive factors or stress that the police have begun to solve the identified problem. Yet another way is to make statements in the media that are positive about the police without having any basis or a very limited support for the statements. Researcher (F) hints that the police's way of dealing with criticism tends to corrupt researchers and states, moreover, that several of his research colleagues seem to acquiesce to these requests from the police. There are also examples of studies and inquiries requested by the police that seem to be part of an effort to mitigate criticism or to build appealing images of the police (Holgersson, 2014).

The case of BRÅ and Statskontoret

In this section we outline how research and inquiries can contribute to the police aim of 'looking good', by presenting actions taken by the agency Brottsförebyggande rådet – BRÅ (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention) and Statskontoret (The Swedish Agency for Public Management).

BRÅ – the challenge of independence

One organisation often asked by the police to undertake research studies is the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ). BRÅ is governed by the Justice Department, i.e. by the ministry whose activities they will be studying. A parallel can be made with the statistical authority that was managed by the Greek Finance Ministry. The former finance minister stated that one of the biggest mistakes was to choose to put the statistical authority under the control of the Finance Ministry, as it caused problems with the balance of power (DN, 2016a). For the Swedish Police, the hierarchical position and placement of BRÅ creates opportunities to receive aid in protecting and strengthening the brand. BRÅ has been criticised for having an almost symbiotic relationship with the police bureaucrats, showing a

strong intent to meet the client's wishes regarding both the evaluation results and how the situation should be communicated (SvD, 2009). Five editorials in a national newspaper put forward criticism regarding conclusions presented by BRÅ in debate articles, reports and press releases. Conclusions from BRÅ have been treated as truths, but the results were questionable. The last editorial questioned BRÅ's existence:

Yes, what would be more natural for a government that embraces independent research than to move the qualified crime research to the universities? Why not at the same time transfer the police research so that this is subjected to scientific requirements. (SvD, 2009).

The following two cases are examples of how BRÅ seems to have a strong intention to meet the client's wishes (cf. Holgersson, 2014):

- Before the start of an evaluation requested by the police, the Director General of BRÅ commented in a way that gave the impression that it was obvious that the project BRÅ was meant to evaluate was successful (Polisen, 2008b).
- Two employees at BRÅ wrote a guest column in the official Stockholm Police newspaper that a project was fruitful (Polisen, 2009b, p. 12), but the report they had written did not support the claims (BRÅ, 2008).

Interviews with three former employees at BRÅ disclose how the tension between BRÅ being a government authority and a research institute created 'perplexity' among the staff. Former employees (F and G) at BRÅ state that the Director General had tried to influence and adjust reports. One of them describes that supervisors are perceived by the employees as prioritising things that best suit those higher up in the hierarchy. This influenced dealing with sensitive research results, and employees report of censored and distorted reports, toning down of negative as well as highlighting positive partial results. BRÅ has previously been criticised for this both by other employees and by external experts who inspect BRÅ's reports (Aftonbladet, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; SvD, 2009).

Another way of adjusting results, according to former employees at BRÅ, is when supervisors revise reports in a way that affects the overall research results. One former employee (G) exemplifies that one of the arguments used by supervisors was to claim methodological weaknesses in sensitive results, even though experts in conducting and analysing data were used in the process.

One former employee (H) recalls a case about a report on violence that was perceived as sensitive since it disclosed that a key figure at BRÅ had, in a previous report, used medical data in an erroneous way. The policy regarding medical data on hospital stay had been changed over the years and it was accentuated that comparisons between years would be misleading, and therefore not valid. However, this key figure at BRÅ had in a previous report compared data with diverse definitions/meanings which led to the conclusion of a decrease in crimes of violence, despite the fact that other medical data indicated an *increase* in violent crime. According to the former employee (H) the report was prevented from being published during the election year in 2006. Moreover, actors within BRÅ are described as pursuing a total block of the report and the report was therefore never printed. Due to external pressure the report was later on published on BRÅ's website, with an additional foreword by BRÅ stating that from this study one cannot draw conclusions on how medical data should be used, nor how crimes of violence have developed.

Former employees at BRÅ (F and G) highlight, independently of each other, how a current key figure at BRÅ has influenced another report and where sensitive information has been erased. In a recent media debate, this person has claimed that these (over 10 years old) results are still valid and that new research about this topic is therefore unnecessary – a topic where the prerequisites (context, demographical landscape, laws) for drawing any conclusions about the matter have changed dramatically. One of the former employees (F) also exemplifies how another report built upon invalid and false data is still accessible on BRÅ's website.

As mentioned earlier, BRÅ has published critical reports. However, there seems to be a tension between carrying out and presenting objective research, as well as a tension in being an authority governed by the justice department and an implicit prerequisite to act in a way that satisfies the police in order to receive further commitment. To have employees that do not accept different forms of interference and might blow the whistle can be problematic.

An example of an employment process at BRÅ

Interviews with three former employees at BRÅ, as well as other data (e.g. SvD, 2009), indicate that BRÅ has an implicit interest in employing easily governed employees. In line with the arguments of image promotion and BRÅ's (in) dependence in relation to the police, the following employment process outlined below serves as an example of this.

Under Swedish law the person most qualified for the job must be offered the position before other candidates (Law 1994:260). A researcher submitted an application for a job at BRÅ, in which the required qualifications were very consistent with the applicant's CV. The following occurred during the employment process:

- Several weeks after the application deadline the applicant wrote and asked about the process. BRÅ replied; *'unfortunately we were unable to make contact with you'*. (Email August, 2016). It is interesting that BRÅ, who advises the police on how to improve their investigation business, did not manage to make contact with a person to whom they have an up-to-date mobile phone number, email and postal address.
- When booking a day for an interview the applicant was asked whether it was really worth him attending the interview due to the uninteresting tasks that were part of the job and because of the low salary. (Telephone call, August 2016).
- BRÅ stated during the interview that they would need to ask the police their opinion on employing the applicant, since this could have a negative effect on the police's perception of BRÅ objectivity (Employment interview, September, 2016).
- During the interview, several questions were asked about the candidate's willingness to revise texts in response to comments, and it was stressed that BRÅ do not formulate their own questions and then carry out independent research studies (Employment interview, September, 2016).

Some months after the application deadline the applicant wrote to BRÅ and asked about the application process and received following answer: *'we have looked over our organisation and decided to make the appointment internally'*. (Email, October, 2016). At the same time, another position in the same small unit was advertised and filled in the normal way, without any similar concerns.

According to Swedish employment rules, even internal positions in the public sector must be advertised with external competition and the advertisement must include information stating that the results of the recruitment process can be contested with The National Board of Appeals. The applicant was supported by a lawyer who wrote to BRÅ and asked questions about the internal recruitment process, but he received the answer that no one had been employed for this position and that there must be an misunderstanding (Emails, October/November, 2016). However, the applicant had contact with five other applicants that had been interviewed for the position and was forwarded an email in which BRÅ had written:

/.../ Unfortunately we have to announce that we have decided to offer another candidate the job. For more information about appeals, etc. see BRÅ's noticeboard and BRÅ's website. (Email October, 2016)

For BRÅ, this emailed information was not in accord with how they had answered the lawyer and with the possibility of contesting the recruitment with the The National Board of Appeals.

Without mentioning this email the applicant wrote and asked BRÅ for all emails that had been sent to the interviewed candidates. According to the principle of public access to official records (Law 2009:400) any authority has to fulfil such a demand. BRÅ's response to the request was that they did not send any emails to the applicants and that all correspondence had been oral.

Twelve weeks after BRÅ decided to terminate the employment process, they launched another employment process. One significant change in the advertisement was that 'good knowledge of police culture and processes within the police' had been deleted, aspects that were highly relevant for the first advertisement and that the applicant possessed. When another potential candidate called and asked for information about the position, as well as why the previously advertised vacancy had not been filled, a representative from BRÅ answered that 'we did not..uh ..uh..find the required profile within those candidates, so we halted the recruitment' (Telephone call, March, 2017) . On the contrary, the description of the required profile had well matched the applicant's CV, along with one other candidate. The other candidate also described how BRÅ was very interested in discovering whether the police had any sanctions towards him/her and when it was clear that he/she had expressed him/herself in a way that the police management did not appreciate, he/she got the impression that the interest in hiring him/her decreased.

Statskontoret and the mission to evaluate the reorganisation of the police

Statskontoret (The Swedish Agency for Public Management) is the Government's organisation for analysis and evaluation of state and state-funded activities. The reorganisation of the Swedish Police has been strongly criticised by various actors and in 2016 Statskontoret was ordered to investigate the organisational change. The Home Secretary referred to this in a tweet (September 2016):

The reorganisation has been blamed for things it has nothing to do with, soon there will be an inquiry from Statskontoret.

And in the media:

To what extent the reorganisation has caused this or that, will be answered in three weeks in an independent inquiry carried out by Statskontoret. (DN, 2016b)

The report from Statskontoret (2016) stated that the Swedish Police are heading in the right direction, even if some problems were identified as well. This aroused the curiosity of two scholars conducting research on the reorganisation (Holgerrsson & Wennström, forthcoming). For example, Statskontoret refers to a publication that is part of an ongoing research study about the Swedish Police's command centres conducted by Holgerrsson (2017a), but does not account for or relate to the main findings of this study. On the contrary, Statskontoret drew the opposite conclusion, such as that *'the implementation of regional command centres has resulted in a higher level of ambition'* (2016, p. 50). This claim is in contrast to Holgerrsson (2017a) who shows that it now takes the police longer to respond, that police patrols are being sent to wrong locations due to a lack of local knowledge, that there is a problem with the work environment in the larger centres, and that they are facing high employee turnover together with recruitment problems. None of these aspects are mentioned in Statskontoret's report. Another conclusion made by Statskontoret, is that *'steps have been taken to come closer to the citizens'* (2016, p. 8), although the regional command centres and the closing of some police stations have resulted in the opposite. The reorganisation has led to an increased distance to the citizens and the police have been structured as a matrix organisation that contradicts the fundamental purposes of the reorganisation (Holgerrsson, 2017b). In addition, before announcing and publishing Statskontoret's report, the authors had changed formulations seen as non-appropriate by the national police commissioner secretariat (DN, 2016c).

The situation described above gave rise to two (audio recorded) interviews with two of those responsible for Statskontoret's report. In the first interview, it was stressed that Statskontoret is a staff organisation to the government and that the report was not an independent inquiry (although the impression according to statements made by Statskontoret and other governmental actors could be interpreted differently). Several interview questions to Statskontoret were questions of clarification concerning the basis for arguments and conclusions in the report. The following excerpt is from the second interview with Statskontoret, and concerns the claim that *'steps have been taken to come closer to the citizens'* (2016, p. 8). One fundamental aspect of the reorganisation was that centralisation would save resources and that more police personnel therefore could work in the field close to the citizens (I: interviewer, S: interviewee, Statskontoret):

S: One thought was that there would be less personnel working in the regional command centres in order to be able to release people to work out in the field. But when you build up RLC and the new PKC you see that you actually...swallow up more personnel.

I: One argument from the Board was that this would save resources in order to free up personnel to work out in the field, close to the citizens [...] but now it has almost the completely opposite effect? If more resources are needed then there are less people available for...

S: Yes, definitely.

I: So this is how you look at this too?

S: Really strange. I completely agree [...]

I: I couldn't quite make sense of it .

S: No, it doesn't hang together

I: [...] It says right at the start (of the report) that it concludes that you come closer to the citizens [...] So I couldn't put it together. What was hidden (between the lines) that I couldn't see?

S: Yes, exactly, there is no logical chain there

I: It's rather the opposite?

S: Yes, exactly. [laughs]

Analysing this and other statements in the report and the entire interview with Statskontoret it becomes clear that there is a lack of explicit support (data) for many conclusions made in the report. The interview also exposes that many significant aspects have been left out of the report, without Statskontoret being able to answer why this should be the case.

Information from Statskontoret gave the impression that the researcher reference group was a guarantee of the quality of the report. However, in interviews with two out of four members (O and P) of the reference group, they clarified that they have only had an advisory role. Following the last advisory meeting content in the report was changed, inter alia because of comments from the police. One of the researchers (P) highlighted a general problem that comments from agencies concerning things other than factual errors influence these kinds of reports. Both researchers (O and P) stated that these types of reports by tradition tend to tread carefully and that it would be preferable to have an independent inquiry into the reorganisation of the police. The response of the two other researchers in the

reference group to decline participation implied the problems described above, with a loyalty to the commissioning organisation and concerns about negative consequences.

From a long-term perspective it could have been desirable to identify and clarify basic/fundamental problems with and obstacles to the reorganisation at an early stage in order to meet those conditions. From a short-term perspective the report can be favourable for the government and the police, in a way that it created breathing space at a time of extensive criticism, but there are reasons to believe that the high value of ‘looking good’ has been prioritised rather than the largest agency in Sweden actually ‘being good’. If this will be the case is too early to say.

Examples of how the aim of ‘looking good’ may limit the possibilities of ‘being good’

We have chosen two short examples and one longer example to understand how branding and value promotion can affect the development in policing areas, in other words – how aims of ‘looking good’ may limit the possibilities of ‘being good’. We will describe how such an ambition can result in negative outcomes on the branding in the long term perspective.

Example 1 – The police’s work against narcotics

A report of the police’s work with narcotics was dismissed by the Police Board. The report disclosed the use of a numbers game within the organisation in order to achieve more favourable statistics (Holgersson, 2007). A research study conducted four years later detected the same problem (Holgersson & Knutsson, 2011). The phenomenon of number games had also been exemplified in more policing areas, such as traffic work and investigations (Holgersson, 2005; Woxblom, Holgersson & Dolmén, 2008), but these were also dismissed by management. It took several more years before the issue was admitted to exist and even the Home Secretary proclaimed that the numbers game within the police must come to an end (SvD, 2014a). Instead of dealing with the identified problem ten years earlier the problem had escalated. The aim of ‘looking good’ had not only led to the work in different operation areas not developing in a desirable manner (Holgersson, 2014), the behaviour of ‘looking good’ had itself been an object of attention with negative outcomes for the brand. The numbers game within the police is so widespread that it has even become an issue in newspaper cartoons.

Example 2 – Organisational silence

Official statements from police districts and top police officials have declared that the openness and acceptance of internal criticism is high (e.g. SR, 2012a). However, a research study pointed towards a widespread fear within the police of coming up with internal and external criticism (Holgerson, forthcoming). An extension of the study showed that many executives at the highest level within the Swedish Police shared this view. One important prerequisite in order to receive access and be able to conduct the study (which had previously been denied in several districts) was not to publish a written report. In this way, the police avoided media criticism. However, with the lack of officially presented and published data there was no external pressure for change.

A study conducted over five years later showed – not surprisingly – that the same problem persisted within the police (Wieslander, 2016; forthcoming). In addition, managers were reported on several occasions to have been violating ‘the freedom to communicate information’ (e.g. JO, 2017b). In recent years, the culture of silence within the police has become a recurring theme in the media. One notable case that caused extensive media coverage was when a high-ranking police manager threatened a subordinate manager saying ‘*if you talk to the media about this you are dead*’ (e.g. SVT, 2016a). And it was not until extensive criticism and attention in the media that the manager was removed. One among many other recurring reports on the same theme is when a chief prosecutor stated that officers had been told not to talk openly with the media and that they are afraid to do so because of potential retaliation:

I become dejected to hear that big, strong police officers don't dare to talk to media. It is a huge problem. (Folkbladet, 2017)

The police received negative publicity in a book describing this phenomenon (Kjöller, 2016). The problem was even addressed at the highest political level, where the Home Secretary was questioned by the opposition about what he is doing to change the culture of silence within the police (Expressen, 2017).

Example 3 – Police work against organised crime

The *Social Intervention Group* has been portrayed as an efficient strategy to reduce youth crime (e.g. Polisen, 2011). The National Police Board arranged a press conference about a Social Intervention Group Project in 12 pilot areas. The outcome was described as a large success, but the police only presented statistics from one of the twelve pilot areas (SR, 2013). In addition, the National Police Commissioner used the statistics from this one area in a

debate article (SvD, 2012) and stated on a national radio programme that the outcome was very good, and:

Almost everyone has changed their lifestyle, and very, very many have stopped committing crimes. (SR, 2013)

A minister also made statements on this issue:

The National Police Commissioner expressed it as 'groundbreaking' when we had a meeting this morning. I believe in this. So far, it has not been going so long - yet these are remarkable results. (SR, 2013)

However, the media found that the number of individuals in the project who committed crime during the project was twice as high as in the statistics presented by the police. The police representatives did not mention significant conclusions from the research report, which stated:

As regards the long-term goals of the pilot project – preventing recruitment into and facilitating defections from criminal gangs and the criminal lifestyle – it is not possible at this moment to say anything conclusively. The statistics regarding reported suspected crimes by participants in the project show no clear trends, apart from the fact that the number of reported suspected crimes fluctuates over the entire follow-up period (Wollter, Kassman & Oscarsson, 2012, p. 137).

The National Police Commissioner did not want to answer questions in the media about the misleading statistics. The Manager of the National Development Unit within the police had difficulties in answering why the the National Police Commissioner declared the project a success and had stated that many individuals had stopped committing crime. This police chief referred to the research study as the basis of the conclusions (SR, 2013), despite, as mentioned earlier, the study not supporting such a conclusion. The authors of the research study did not comment on the exaggerated media statements made by the police. In this sense, one can argue that the silence or no reaction from scholars contributed to the positive branding of the police.

This fundamental problem can be tracked back to a governmental report that one police chief along with a researcher as secretary was responsible for (SOU 2010:15). In this report the outcome of a project in the Stockholm Police District was exaggerated and misleading. The acclaimed and successful project *Operation Ceasefire* in the US was described in a way suggesting that this scheme could be transferred to the Swedish context. However, there are significant contextual differences between the US and Sweden,

differences that make it hard to incorporate in the Swedish context. The Swedish report lacked the information that an important component in the project *Operation Ceasefire* was to create a concrete trustworthy threat of consequences for individuals continuing with their criminal lifestyle. In the US there are significantly different opportunities to create such a threat. The research study that evaluated social intervention groups touched on the problem:

The fundamental question regarding giving their consent is really, what benefit will the young people get from participating in social intervention? Why should they accept this agreement? The issue has been overlooked in the national pilot project (Wollter et. al., 2012, p. 146).

This important and clearly stated assumption was presented far back in the report (p. 146) and was not highlighted. This can be a strategy in order to not challenge the Police Authority who ordered the evaluation. The work with the *Social Intervention Group* continued. Other methods that did not have a good outcome were also used and marketed with the aim of 'looking good' (Holgersson, 2013; Rostami et al., 2014) and some methods were also counter productive but gave an impression that the police were working well (Holgersson, 2014). All this was based on hopes and marketing that the police were about to succeed in their mission within the current framework and with reference to investments in measures that did not work.

A few years later it and it is obvious that the police have not succeeded. Numbers of shootings are increasing and gang crime is extensive. (e.g. SVT, 2016b). The police have addressed the issue of not being able to deal with their main task due to the increasing number of shootings (e.g. Expressen, 2016; GP, 2016; SvD, 2017). Officials within the police had warned both internally and externally over a long period of an escalation of criminality in these areas if the police did not change their working methods, strategy and how these areas were prioritised by the police (e.g. DN, 2000; 2013; Goda grannar, 2008). The top management ignored these warnings and, as mentioned above, chose methods and organisational structures with very little likelihood of success. Instead, the police prioritised window dressing that provided an image of them having good opportunities of achieving success, despite carrying on with ineffective work against organised crime (Holgersson, 2014).

Main findings and conclusions

In this paper we identify and describe paradoxes between organisational image promotion and how organisations function, and we point out the challenges when carrying out independent research in an organisation which has a strong aim to look good. We outline the reception of several research studies and inquiries within one organisation and problematise these in relation to theories of legitimacy building and value branding. The significance of legitimacy work and value branding, together with the built-in risk that (critical) research challenges the façade of a well-functioning organisation, causes several dilemmas. Researchers and others working in relation to the authority stress that the conditions affect how reports are presented, published and received, and how these conditions affect both the objectivity, legitimacy and the possibility for researchers to stay in the field. Scholars conducting research on the police have stated that it is problematic to disclose criticism that challenges the police's image promotion, due to potential consequences such as risking access, reprisals and one's professional career. Despite claiming, and striving for, research to be objective and free, the value branding of organisations restricts and holds back these ideals. To sum up, there are good opportunities for an organisation such as the Swedish Police to be aided by scholars to build the desired image of the organisation, a phenomenon observed in other organisations as well (e.g. Wertz, Kyriss, Paranjape, Glantz, 2011).

Besides these aspects, a final remark considers the organisational development. Through a variety of examples, this paper also shows that aims and practices of image promotion have in the long run obstructed changes and organisational development in several areas. To 'look good' can therefore be contradictory to 'being good'; when the police are reporting success and rejecting failure, then signals are sent upward and outward that they are on the right track. When effort is put into official value branding, the risk is that lesser effort will be put into solving and improving the area under criticism – since it is presented as an area in little need of improvement and serves, moreover, as a reason not to grant further resources. In recent years, the police have dramatically increased the resources and number of employees working with communication (Forsell & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2014). These are resources that could have been used on other policing areas to improve policing. Basing work on adjusted reports and ignoring critical research may lead to structural errors being maintained. This may also lead to counter productive work, with society as the ultimate loser. We argue that these paradoxical conditionings and outcomes are in need of further, more systematic – and critical – research and investigation.

Implications and final comments

This paper proposes risks for agencies in prioritising value branding before, or at the expense of, organisational development and learning. In fact, we argue, that too much focus on image promotion may lead to a reduction in organisational change, since potential problems or obstacles are ignored – and cease to be, in an official sense anyway. Although we partly build our case on a small sample of interviews, the interviewed scholars have long postdoctoral experience in the field – experience that they also draw upon to identify and support their accounts of researching the police. It is likely that other scholars may have opposing experiences of researching the field. The purpose is not to demonise some or to victimise others, but to understand the long-term costs for an organisation, as well as the costs for actors pursuing the goal of independent and beneficial knowledge. This case is about the Swedish Police. However, we are quite convinced that this is not the only case with similar traits, although it is a remarkable one. Society's foremost representative for upholding laws and rights, including the freedom of speech, is – or should be – the police.

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