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REFLECTION IN AID OF INTERACTION —BUILDING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING IN CIVILIAN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

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Summary

Interaction and collaboration with people from various backgrounds in dynamic, challenging and multidimensional contexts is an essential part of civilian crisis management. With a micro-level focus, this article examines the role of reflection in supporting interaction in operations. Drawing on interviews with five Finnish civilian crisis management experts and a review of current literature, the article elucidates the potential of reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection in recognising, examining and dealing with the uniqueness and complexity of each interlocutor, including oneself; their ways of perceiving, thinking and behaving; situational variabilities; the changing and dynamic contexts of interaction as well as the identities, representations, relationships and power structures shaped by and constructed in these contexts. The topical exploration and cases in this article demonstrate that processes of reflection hold the potential to serve as valuable tools in interaction and are needed when aiming for a mutually-built shared understanding. At the same time, carrying out these processes may be demanding even at a personal level. A further examination and discussion of the potential means of supporting and facilitating the practice of reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection as well as encouraging the development of the abilities needed in these processes of reflection are suggested.

1 Introduction

Shared understandings, such as those related to worldviews, beliefs, norms, frames, symbols, discourses and representations have a significant impact on crisis management. It has been argued that they have an even greater influence on peace interventions than wider economic, political, social and material contexts do. However, instead of one collective understanding shared to the same extent by all of the stakeholders in peace operations, a multiplicity of understandings exist. These understandings may be influenced for instance by interpretations of history as well as by professional, ideological, cultural and normative frameworks and they affect how contexts, interests and constraints are seen. (Autesserre 2011, 1, 3–8.) In addition to the variation in these socially constructed shared understandings, the ways of understanding the world vary at a personal level: no two people have lived in exactly similar surroundings and interpreted their own experiences similarly (Keisala 2012, 12–13, 30).

As a result, different interests, constraints, visions and identities emerge between organisations or sub-units of an organisation (Autesserre 2011, 3) or between two individuals involved in crisis management. Furthermore, interveners' conceptions of peace, peacemaking and peacebuilding may differ from those of local populations (Autesserre 2011, 3, 6). In effect, peacebuilding efforts of today have often been criticised for "not giving enough consideration to local realities and the needs of local populations" and for the lack of evolving "in collaboration and open dialogue with local actors" (Fjelde & Höglund 2011, 20). Imposing foreign modes of thinking and acting as well as privileging "thematic expertise" over "local knowledge" may result e.g. in resentment, resistance, lack of local ownership, and worsened relationships between foreign peacebuilders and local stakeholders, thereby reducing the effectiveness of interventions (see Autesserre 2014b, 17–18, 97–114).

Accordingly, in civilian crisis management, the ability to build common ground between various understandings both within and beyond the operation personnel appears essential to increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of peace operations (see also Pylvänäinen 2020, 109–110). While processes, structures and practices which enable constructive interaction are indispensable, the personnel's interaction skills can be seen as one of the very core competences in daily life in operations (see, e.g., Anttila 2012, 116). As a Finnish civilian crisis management expert interviewed for this article summarised, "An operation does not function without interaction." It has even been posited that the success of crisis management "depends on the personnel's skills in collaborating with local people and the others attending the process" (Anttila 2012, 115).

In discussions on interaction and crisis management, the concepts of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity have been gaining prominence in various stakeholders' discourses. In academia, increasing attention to culture and crisis management has emerged especially in the fields of anthropology and psychology. (See, e.g., Ådahl 2009; Autesserre 2011.) Even though cultural awareness and sensitivity may be considered relevant[1] to building a shared understanding, there is still room and need for more attention to one of the most fundamental parts of civilian crisis management, that is, interaction and collaboration with people from various backgrounds in changing and challenging contexts. Based on Holohan's (2019) research on European civilian, military and police peacekeeping personnel, training in soft skills—identified especially as communication, cultural awareness and gender awareness in the study's interview data—is uneven and limited, while the vast majority of the participants in her study desired more training and practice in them. With respect to the shift to more *people-centred* operations recommended in the 2015 report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) in the UN framework (see United Nations General Assembly & Security Council 2015), abilities needed in interaction could be considered one of the key areas in developing training.[2]

This article aims to contribute to deeper insights into building a shared understanding in civilian crisis management by examining the role of reflection in supporting interaction. Attention is paid especially to the micro level of daily interaction in operations. It is notable, though, that micro level dynamics and structural and contextual factors are not separate from each other: instead, interaction is always situated in and affected by a con-

1 Although cultural awareness and sensitivity are often referred to, the actual definition of these concepts in crisis management appears many times to remain unclarified (see also Partanen 2009, 32). Their relevance for building a shared understanding depends on the meanings they are given.

2 Similarly, Heinonen (2017, 65) argues, "If we are to be more 'people-centered' and 'field-oriented' as the HIPPO recommendations urge, it is necessary to focus on the quality of the communication skills needed between peacekeepers and local people."

text shaped by multiple factors. The five experienced Finnish civilian crisis management experts interviewed for this article repeatedly reflected on the daily interaction in operations in relation to a variety of contextual, situational, structural and personal background factors. The elements addressed by them were categorised by using qualitative content analysis and are shortly viewed in the next section to illustrate some of the multidimensionality and significance of the context of interaction. After a brief illustration, the focus is set on interaction at the micro level. The role of reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection in supporting interaction and building a shared understanding is addressed by examining the interview data using academic literature and other relevant research. Keeping to the micro level focus set in this article, some challenges to these processes of reflection are also examined. Finally, a discussion on the potential means of facilitating the practice of reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection as well as supporting the development of the abilities needed in these processes of reflection is encouraged.

2 The multidimensional context of interaction

The following five, partly interrelated categories of factors influencing interaction were distinguished in the interview data: (1) the crisis-affected context, (2) state- and system-level factors, (3) operation-level factors, consisting of the subcategories of operation structures and work community, (4) personal background factors and (5) the deployed experts' transnational personal lives. Due to the complexity of the social world, the variety of operational contexts as well as the limited number of the interviewees, the list of categories cannot be considered exhaustive. Furthermore, the content of the categories varies depending on operations and situations. Hence, the illustration here carries no more than some elucidative and indicative value.

The crisis-affected context

Obviously, daily life and interaction in operations are in many ways influenced by the *crisis-affected context* itself. For instance, the security situation, stress, time pressure, material and technological conditions, political tensions, the conflicting interests of different parties, biased information and difficulties in gaining "knowledge of the big picture" were mentioned by the interviewees as factors which make interaction more challenging. Because of the changing and challenging character of the crisis-affected context, foreseeable patterns cannot always be identified and pre-existing answers to questions raised in the field may not be found. Moreover, as noted by one of the interviewees, one cannot know beforehand how the circumstances will affect one's own behaviour and reactions.

State- and system-level factors

Referred to here as *state- and system-level factors*, the second category is characterised i.a. by the variation in the national practices related to recruiting, deploying and training experts, and the agendas and interests of the deploying states. These may also include a lack of common rules, or deficiencies related to them. For instance, according to the interview data, differences in training place experts in unequal positions with respect to their mission-specific knowledge.[3] Furthermore, the deploying states' varying limitations in the durations of deployments affect the experts' chances of advancing to higher positions in the mission and differences in salaries may result in potential tensions and taboos among personnel. The interview data also supports the view that national contingents can be important in knowledge and information transfer, and suggests that the decisions of national agencies to prefer deploying experts to certain positions may affect the whole contingent's access to information. The unequal positions and power relations produced by the state- and system-level factors not only affect the daily interaction between international experts but also between international and local mission personnel in complex ways (see, e.g., Rubinstein, Keller & Scherger 2008, 546).

3 As for the differences in recruitment and training practices causing variety in personnel's competences, see also Dumur-Laanila & Karjalainen (n.d., 2).


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Operation-level factors: operation structures and the work community

Operation-level factors consist of two interrelated categories: *operation structures* and *the work community*. As for the structural level, the mission mandate is a fundamental factor creating the frames of interaction and goals for action. Yet, the questions as to what a mandate actually means and how it can be implemented in the local context are constantly negotiated as part of the daily work at different levels. Additionally, the code of conduct, knowledge management structures and the links between knowledge and power, procedures and functioning of disciplinary actions, and laws and regulations guiding the work were discussed by the interviewees. Furthermore, the positions and duties of the personnel were referred to as factors having a great influence on interaction within the mission: they, e.g., provide the personnel with different perspectives and may affect the emphases given by them when negotiating the mandate implementation. Additionally, a lack of knowledge or understanding between mission units, between headquarters and the field-based personnel as well as between the different projects of an organisation were discussed.

Within these frames and structures, the operation personnel form a work community which is affected strongly by temporality, change and the conflict-affected context. According to the interviewees, it is a "pressured" and "suddenly created new working environment" characterised by "constant rotation". Effects on interaction may be diverse. For instance, the interview data indicates that the temporary nature of the deployments and the work community may encourage personnel to bypass problems rather than invest in interaction.[4] Part of the data suggests that, on one hand, "all kinds of games played at workplaces" aka. office politics, may escalate, while on the other hand, there may be increased motivation to avoid creating "cliques" or causing any additional mental burden.

Many of the interviewees also emphasised that the personnel mostly consist of a selected group of highly experienced and skilled professionals with a purpose-driven mindset and awareness of the working context. Yet, as pointed out in some accounts, this shared expertise does not preclude the existence of a wide range of motivations for taking on the particular job and mission. Even previous operational experience may be a burden if earlier ways of acting are pushed uncritically into a new context.

Based on the interview data, when living abroad and working in a conflict-affected context, the significance of the community may increase.[5] The shared responsibility for each other's well-being, especially the important role of those in superior positions to attend to their subordinates, and the significance of networks were highlighted by some of the interviewees. Misbehaviour, such as bullying, spreading false rumours and ostracising group members—issues which are not specific to crisis management work communities exclusively—may have an impact of a particular kind when working and living in an environment that may be stressful and new. When living with the same people one works with, some may find it difficult to keep work and leisure separate. One participant identified escalated situations within the work community as one of the reasons behind the mission personnel's burnouts when support was not available. Within the work community, interaction may also be affected by competition for the same position as well as by both formal and informal hierarchies potentially causing tensions.

The questions as to what a mandate actually means and how it can be implemented in the local context are constantly negotiated as part of the daily work at different levels

4 Furthermore, according to Anttila (2012, 172), "Because crisis management missions are temporary in nature, too little attention has been paid to establishing the circumstances that support motivation and well-being in ways that are common in ordinary working places."

5 Likewise, the significance of i.a. soft skills and interaction within the organisation is emphasised when working in challenging contexts (Dumur-Laanila & Karjalainen n.d., 2).

Personal background factors

Fourthly, a number of *personal background factors* influencing interaction were addressed: e.g. cultural backgrounds; nationality; gender; age; personal history, including educational and professional backgrounds and previous experiences; personality; and language were seen to influence interaction at the micro level. Differences between military, civilian and police backgrounds, in particular, were often considered significant to interaction. It should also be noted that being a crisis management expert is a background factor and a role per se. For instance, one of the interviewees considered that being a foreigner working in a conflict-affected context is a uniting factor among the personnel. Another interviewee pointed out that when interacting with locals, the experts are representing not only themselves but also the mission, the organisation and their home countries—which also serves to illustrate the interrelatedness of various categories introduced here.

On one hand, personal background factors were often depicted as relevant to a person's ways of thinking, including their values, and to ways of behaving.[6] In practical terms, different communication styles, orientations towards hierarchy or understandings of various terms may arise. On the other hand, aspects categorised as personal background factors here may also affect the way one is seen by others, e.g., by invoking negative or positive attitudes and expectations (see, e.g., Pylvänäinen 2020). Accordingly, background factors may also be connected to various statuses and roles as well as power relations. Moreover, as visible in one of the accounts, the variety in personal backgrounds contributes to personnel members possessing different sets of knowledge, skills and experience. This also means that the personnel are not equally experienced in all areas, which, based on the account, may have some influence on collaboration. Furthermore, the divergent sets of knowledge and skills may again contribute to the construction of various positions and relations according to what kind of knowledge is valued or privileged (see also Autesserre 2014b).

The background factors are coincidentally present, as the concept of intersectionality elucidates: the social world is shaped by many, mutually influencing factors rather than only one of them at a time (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016, 11). Furthermore, which factor or combination of them appears as or is made relevant in a certain situation may not be straightforward. As Keisala (2012, 29–30) points out, some differences may appear as culturally, socially, politically or economically more significant than others. Hence, even if named as the *personal* background factors here, it should be noted that the way certain elements in a person's background are seen and interpreted is connected to wider dimensions than personal or interpersonal aspects per se. For instance, as visible in one of the interviewees' account, in some contexts a colonial history may play a role (see also Autesserre 2014b, 181). Taking another example, meanings given to "culture" vary, are sometimes intertwined with politics, religion, nationality and history and may affect how someone from a certain background is seen (Pylvänäinen 2020). The configurations of background factors are thus complex both in terms of their potential influence on individuals themselves and how, why, when and to what extent they are made or considered relevant in social interaction and by whom. This perspective allows interpreting the meanings given to personal background factors in the social world as, at least to some extent, a contextually specific issue.

The deployed experts' transnational personal lives

The fifth identified category distinguished in the data consists of *the deployed experts' transnational personal lives*. Transnationalism as a concept refers to relationships, ties, linkages and interactions, whether social, economic or political, across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec 2009, 1–2). Even if not physically present, issues in one's personal life may indirectly affect daily work in operations. Three of the interviewees, whilst considering the most extreme examples as rather rare cases, illustrated situations in which events e.g. back home affected someone's behaviour at work significantly. In this way, the direct context of interaction interrelates with other spatial contexts.

6 According to Autesserre (2014a, 495), "Most analyses of international peacekeepers on the ground demonstrate that their national, organizational, professional and gender cultures orient the choice of specific intervention strategies and affect their relationships with local populations."

3 Context as "a constitutive force"

Despite its incomplete nature, even a brief illustration of this kind serves to reveal some of the multidimensionality of the interaction context in crisis management: both macro-, meso- and micro-level elements as well as temporal and spatial dimensions are involved (see also Broome & Collier 2012, 253). What is, perhaps, even more notable is that the context appears, in accordance with the argument by Broome and Collier (2012, 253), not only as a "scene" or "backdrop" of peacebuilding. As they claim following Halualani and Nakayama (2010), the context is "an intersecting and constitutive force which produces identity positioning and relations" (Broome & Collier 2012, 253). Furthermore, the context may be significant for emotional and psychological aspects also present in interaction. For instance, stress and frustration were recounted as being related to structural and contextual issues by some of the interviewees.

As the illustration also makes visible, encounters are situated at the interface of a varying combination of influencing factors. Interaction should, hence, be approached as contextually situated and potentially unique. At the same time, the adaptability of one strategy of action to each situation of interaction becomes problematised and a need to construct a strategy suitable to the specific situation at hand is emphasised. (See Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005; Kemppainen 2009.) Correspondingly, i.a. flexibility, openness and an ability to interact "in different roles in different situations" were considered to be valuable by many of the interviewees, and "over precisely fixed expectations about interaction" as one of the factors posing challenges to interaction.

Yet another important point is revealed when paying regard to the fourth category. Due to the variety in personal backgrounds, together with differences in ways of interpreting one's experiences, it can be argued that each crisis management expert, as any other person, has "a personal web of meanings" (Keisala 2012, 21-22, *transl.*) or a set of "interpretive frameworks" (Avruch 2016, 13) that is only partly shared with other people. Furthermore, according to Keisala (2012, 21–22), the personal web of meanings is incoherent in itself. From this perspective, each encounter can be approached as intercultural: as Koole and ten Thije (2001, 571) put it, "intercultural communication, as any type of communication, is only possible when interactants construct a common ground of meanings and practices that are oriented to as shared".[7] [8]

Interaction now becomes a learning situation (see also Keisala 2012, 13; Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 70, 75), both because of the variety of contextual and situational factors and because of the different personal webs of meanings of the interlocutors. The more the backgrounds of the interlocutors vary, the more they need to learn from one another to reach a shared ground upon which to base their interaction (Keisala 2012, 13) and collaboration. Otherwise, one leans on assumptions about the other's ways of thinking and behaviour or ignores their views (Pylvänäinen 2020, 7).

The abovementioned aspects considered, abilities to recognise, examine and deal with the uniqueness and complexity of each interlocutor, including oneself; their ways of perceiving, thinking and behaving; situational variabilities; the changing and dynamic contexts of interaction as well as the identities, representations, relationships and power structures shaped by and constructed in these contexts are needed in interaction. In the following sections, the role of reflection in tackling the challenge and contributing to building a shared understanding is discussed.

Each crisis management expert, as any other person, has "a personal web of meanings"

7 The process of building a common ground of meanings and practices has been conceptualised as intercultural discourse (Koole & ten Thije 2001), building a third culture (see, e.g., Saastamoinen 2009, 59) or negotiating reality (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005; Berthoin Antal & Friedman 2008) in the intercultural communication literature. In the field of conflict resolution, Väyrynen (2005) addresses reaching a shared understanding from a Gadamerian perspective and utilises his expression "fusion of horizons".

8 With respect to the 2015 HIPPO recommendations, Heinonen (2017, 53) argues that "In the 'people-centered' scenario, it cannot be presumed in advance that any common ideological, religious, or philosophical ground exists; it must be found."

4 "You yourself are your own tool" —critical reflection and self-reflection

Reflection as a concept is used here widely to refer to "an active and purposeful process of exploration and discovery" (Gray 2007, 496) in which both cognition and emotions are involved in an interrelated manner (Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985, 11). It can be practiced both alone as an internal process and collectively together with others. Following Mälkki (2011, 9), and similarly to many approaches in adult education, the focus is set on "the intent of increasing awareness and assessing assumptions". Through reflection, the justification for one's beliefs can be examined "primarily to guide action and to reassess the efficacy of the strategies and procedures used in problem solving" (Mezirow 1990, xvi). Reflection, therefore, has also to do with improving the functioning of a set of practices and achieving the intended results (see Brookfield 2009, 293).

Under the umbrella of the concept of reflection, as defined in this article, critical reflection means specifically reviewing the validity of one's assumptions from conscious and unconscious previous learning as well as their sources and consequences (Gray 2007, 496–497; Leung & Kember 2003, 69; Mezirow 1990, xvi). Critical self-reflection, in turn, is about "reassessing the way one has posed problems and one's orientation to perceiving, believing and acting" (Gray 2007, 497; see also Mezirow 1990, xvi). Critical reflection and self-reflection are, hence, understood here as oriented towards oneself instead of the other interlocutor (Keisala 2012, 35). However, a person's ways of understanding the world neither stem directly from an objective reality nor develop in a vacuum but are influenced by other people (see Burr 2015, 10). Accordingly, critical reflection and self-reflection may lead to viewing not only one's personal ways of thinking and acting but also wider dimensions such as ideologies, practices and inequalities (Keisala 2017, 45). Critical reflection in particular incorporates attention to social perspectives and power relations (see, e.g., Gray 2007, 496; Brookfield 2009, 293).

Based on the interview data, civilian crisis management may provide experts with experiences that trigger reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection. In the interviewees' accounts it was mentioned that their work ethics, ways of engaging with others, ways of acting and stereotypes had been questioned; that other people's, such as experienced colleagues' views and ways of acting had challenged the interviewees' own thoughts in a positive sense; and that certain situations had placed an interviewee in "a school of humbleness" in terms of reflecting on how one's own way of acting could be improved. One of the interviewees depicted reflection on one's assumptions, values, beliefs and attitudes being "continuous". Challenging situations, successes and failures, seeing others' ways of acting—whether in a positive or negative light—as well as feedback given by colleagues were each seen as evoking critical reflection and self-reflection, leading to widening one's perspectives, personal growth and learning, including an increase in self-knowledge. According to Anttila (2012, 187), "Reflective skills should enable learning new skills during the duties and facilitate the various learning and adaptation processes required during and after the mission."

In adult education, the role of reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection in the development of expertise and adult learning is generally recognised (see, e.g., Mälkki 2012, 208). Within the framework of transformative learning theory, pioneered by Jack Mezirow, the learning process emerging through critical self-reflection and involving a perspective transformation is called transformative learning. Like in the accounts given by the interviewees, the process starts when encountering an alternative perspective or a situation that challenges assumptions based on previous experiences. Mezirow calls this a disorienting dilemma. (Cranton 2016, 7, 1; Mezirow 1991, 167–168; Mezirow 1990, xvi.) The event starting the process may be a dramatic one but, more often, the process is characterised by graduality and cumulativeness (Cranton & Wright 2008, 34). Critical self-reflection then allows the perspective transformation that Mezirow defines as:

> *the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating [sic], and integrative perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings* (Mezirow 1991, 167).


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Although oriented towards oneself, critical reflection and self-reflection were seen as valuable for interaction with others by the interviewees, as "you yourself are your tool." Critical reflection and self-reflection were seen to provide a deeper understanding of oneself and the reasons behind one's feelings, behaviour and thinking: "the better you understand yourself, the better you probably understand how you act and why you do something in a certain way." These understandings then can equip an individual for interaction with others.

"The better you understand yourself, the better you probably understand how you act and why you do something in a certain way."

According to Keisala (2012, 21, 216–217), critical reflection allows gaining a better understanding of the influence of one's cultural background on one's perceptions, thinking and behaviour—as for the cultural background, in this paper each person is seen to be affected by various cultural influences instead of representing one culture (see, e.g., Keisala 2012, 21; 2017, 41). Keisala raises critical reflection and self-reflection as necessary both for intercultural interaction and for the development of intercultural competences; she also suggests seeing the latter as transformative learning. (Keisala 2012, 35, 37, 197, 216–217; Keisala 2017, 42.) Anttila (2012, 100), in turn, considers transformative learning styles as "crucial for adopting core competences in crisis management, namely collaboration skills and local awareness."

Critical reflection had also led some of the interviewees to view wider dimensions such as inequality, levels of privilege and justice, and a contrast between political discourse and the daily life of people in the host countries (see also Keisala 2017, 45). In accordance with Mezirow's theory (1991, 167), in some of the accounts the processes of critical reflection affected future actions and plans.

In addition, although not necessarily representing critical reflection and self-reflection in the sense illustrated above, looking at oneself may provide civilian crisis management experts with other valuable insights, too. When working and living in a conflict-affected context, self-reflection, combined with awareness of how one usually feels and behaves, was considered to contribute to surveying one's well-being by some of the interviewees. From this perspective, the need for reflexive abilities may be emphasised in challenging working contexts.

5 The role of reflection in the process of building a common ground of meanings and practices

In light of the previous section, understanding oneself appears to be valuable in interaction. Yet, if aiming to build a shared understanding with others, this awareness is obviously not enough. If pursuing a common ground of meanings and practices that is co-created rather than is dictated by one party, exploring both one's own and the other interlocutor's tacit assumptions and testing out new ways of thinking and behaving become necessary (see Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 70; Keisala 2012, 182). Critical reflection and self-reflection now appear as tools needed both in one's personal process and in the collective process so as to increase the likeliness of reaching a genuinely shared understanding (see Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 70). Indeed, according to Keisala, critical reflection not only contributes to gaining a better understanding of the influence of cultural background on one's own perceptions, thinking and behaviour but also allows similar insights to develop towards others. Moreover, critical reflection may provide one with abilities to ask others questions which are relevant to interaction. (Keisala 2012, 216.)

Berthoin Antal and Friedman (2004; 2008; Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005) conceptualise a process of this kind as negotiating reality. It combines inquiry and advocacy, aiming to discover "what makes the most sense with the information available in the given circumstances" (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 80). By

advocacy, they mean "sharing the reasoning behind" one's thinking with others (Berthoin Antal & Friedman 2004, 18–19). Inquiry means "exploring and questioning both one's own reasoning and the reasoning of others" (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 80). Openness to different ways of thinking and to finding inconsistencies or blind spots in one's own reasoning is needed (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 80)—as an interviewee argued, reflection is a prerequisite for compromises and adjusting one's views and, if proved wrong, even the ability to give up one's stance is required.

When inquiring into other people's perspectives, genuine curiosity and appreciation are valuable (see Berthoin Antal & Friedman 2004, 18). Listening and willingness to understand raised by the interviewees relate to Berthoin Antal and Friedman's concept of inquiry. However, as an interviewee pointed out, listening is not enough but you need to make sure that you understand. Therefore, as Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005, 80) argue drawing on Dewey (1938), "Inquiry often requires a conscious effort to suspend judgement, experience doubt and accept a degree of uncertainty until a new understanding is achieved." From this perspective, genuine inquiry may be emotionally relatively demanding. As for appreciation, respect for others and their competence as well as trustworthiness were raised by some of the interviewees. Respect is also crucial in order to avoid intrusion into the other person's private space—the boundaries between professional and private space are not set but always demand clarification (Boud & Walker 1998, 201).

When it comes to advocacy, giving reasons for one's stances were raised by the majority of the interviewees. One of them expressed, "– – it is part of (your) interaction skills to be able to get across your view in a well-argued manner in a way that is suitable in that specific situation."

Exploring and testing one's own and the other's assumptions then serve as "a basis for learning new ways of seeing and doing things effectively with other people from different backgrounds" (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 77). In civilian crisis management, according to one interviewee:

> *It is, after all, also the strength of the community that there are different ways of working and different ways of understanding things and dealing with them, and if these can be openly discussed, the result which then represents the joint understanding is often a stronger way then to proceed with the matter as so many different perspectives are already taken into account.*[9]

This way, differences may appear as opportunities, as negotiating reality together expands "the range of alternatives for understanding the situation and taking effective action" (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 82).

While emphasising learning from one another, the approach discourages employing stereotypes (see also Keisala 2012, 12–13). As Väyrynen (2005, 351–352) puts it in the field of conflict resolution, "The claim that one knows the other person and can predict her behaviour keeps the claims of the other person at a distance and cannot, according to Gadamer, serve as a basis for understanding, therewith for joint decisions." Relatedly, an interviewee stressed they avoid making assumptions about people they do not know as it is not "constructive or useful". For this reason, even cultural knowledge studied in advance may, at worst, hamper interaction despite good intentions if it is used in a way that ends exploration rather than keeps one open to learning (Bertho-

Even cultural knowledge studied in advance may, at worst, hamper interaction despite good intentions if it is used in a way that ends exploration rather than keeps one open to learning.

9 For similar accounts given by civilian crisis management experts interviewed for another study, see Pylvänäinen 2020, 96–97.

in Antal & Friedman, 2004). The same applies to previous experience when it makes one unreceptive to new knowledge (see Berthoin Antal & Friedman 2004)—an assumption that one already knows the ways of thinking and behaviour of the other does not contribute to mutual learning (Keisala 2012, 12). From this perspective, when it comes to cultural awareness in civilian crisis management, training and engaging in critical reflection, critical self-reflection and negotiating reality become vital in order to avoid this pitfall.

Other aspects of prior knowledge and expertise pertaining to areas outside culture are equally prone to hampering learning and mission operations when they are used as "the end point of analysis" rather than "a point of departure for inquiry" (see Berthoin Antal & Friedman 2004, 19–20). Critical reflection, critical self-reflection and negotiating reality with others are therefore also necessary when aiming to understand local needs and contexts and attempting to fuse local and international expertise and knowledge (see also Pylvänäinen 2020, 109–111). With respect to this matter, processes of reflection and negotiating reality are also needed beyond the micro level.

6 Unpleasant emotions and unawareness of internalised assumptions as potential challenges to reflection

Utilising the processes of reflection as well as inquiry and advocacy as tools to build a shared understanding may sound obvious. However, in practice, negotiating reality may be faced with many challenges and often requires that particular attention be paid in an intentional manner. As approaching interaction as a contextually situated process implies, part of the challenges are related to various contextual and structural factors which, for the most part, cannot be addressed within the scope of this article.[10] The limited scope, however, is not meant to suggest ignoring structural and contextual issues—quite the opposite, as will become clear in the following sections, the processes of reflection and critically reflexive practice can be considered one of the essential elements needed in recognising and addressing these issues as well as the power relations, identity positionings and representations they construct.

Even at the micro level, applying to each interlocutor, reflection as such "may not be something one willingly takes up and easily carries out" (Mälkki 2010, 55). Leung and Kember consider it improbable that critical reflection would take place frequently. One of the micro-level challenges lies in the very nature of embedded beliefs: assumptions may be so deeply internalised that it becomes difficult to identify them as assumptions. One is not necessarily aware of their existence at all. (Leung & Kember 2003, 69.) Becoming aware of them may be even more difficult when acting with people sharing these assumptions (see Mälkki 2011, 34). Neither is it easy to "– – interrupt engrained patterns of response, even if one recognizes the value of new approaches" (Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005, 83).

According to Leung and Kember, especially topics central to one's main interests and activities involve deeply embedded beliefs, which makes critical reflection easier if the topic is less relevant to these activities (Leung & Kember 2003, 69). In the context of civilian crisis management, both peacebuilding itself and each expert's respective field of expertise may, therefore, demand particular attention and effort if critical reflection is to be practiced. For instance, in her article looking at the role that assumptions play in influencing peacebuilding effectiveness, focusing on the perspective of international support to local peace efforts, Autesserre (2017) i.a. illustrates three common beliefs[11] about peacebuilding and peacebuilders' role that are often taken for granted—

10 To give an example, according to Autesserre (2017, 121) "the power dynamics between international and local peacebuilders are such that the latter have little opportunity to challenge even the most counterproductive ideas." Taking another example, visible in part of the interview data, e.g. pressured and busy circumstances may, for their part, challenge the practice of reflection (see also Autesserre 2017, 121). Furthermore, some cultural influences related, e.g., to interpersonal communication and dialogue may discourage rather than encourage engaging in joint reflection (Fook & Askeland 2007). For instance, sometimes expressing thoughts to relatively unfamiliar people may involve problematics, and for this reason some means of promoting openness may even become disadvantaging (Boud & Walker 1998, 200).

11 According to Autesserre (2017, 126), "Many international programs in support of local conflict resolution rely on unsupported and flawed assumptions, such as: Good things always go together; peacebuilding efforts are always necessary; and insiders lack the capacity and knowledge to resolve their own predicaments."

yet, according to her, they lack a solid basis and are actually harmful. One of the interviewees, in turn, pointed out that a person's notion of their competences may hinder the practice of reflection if they are not able to recognise the need for learning.

The second factor potentially challenging critical reflection and self-reflection are the unpleasant emotions arising when one's established perspectives and previous assumptions become questioned (see Mälkki 2010). Becoming conscious of and reflecting on one's assumptions may even invoke feelings of "guilt, fear, shame, a sense of loss, or general anxiety" (Dirkx 2006, 19). Drawing on Mezirow (1991, 168), challenges to established perspectives "often call into question deeply held personal values and threaten our very sense of self". These kinds of emotions, called edge-emotions by Mälkki, are "biologically anchored" (Mälkki 2010, 56) and emerge to maintain the consistency of one's *meaning perspective*[12]. When experiencing them, one may be automatically oriented back to what Mälkki calls a comfort zone, the state characterised by more pleasant emotions present when the meaning perspective remains unquestioned. (Mälkki 2010.) In this way, edge-emotions may function as a counter-force to reflection: the tendency to reflect only within the comfort zone considerably hinders the natural deepening of one's understanding of one's feelings, thinking and behaviour (Mälkki 2010; Mälkki, 2011, 33).

On the other hand, emotions may also aid reflection and learning in many ways (see, e.g., Keisala 2017, 43; Jokikokko 2016, 221–223). Mälkki (2010, 56) explains that "The essential question is whether one is automatically oriented to ignore and explain away the distraction caused by the aroused edge-emotions, or whether one is able to approach these emotions as an existing experience one may try to understand." Representing the latter option, one of the interviewees illustrated: "(I) need to reflect on why I am so immensely irritated by this." In this way, edge-emotions may lead one "to the crux of dilemma" (Mälkki & Green 2014, 14) and serve as a stimulus to reflect on their roots[13] (Mälkki 2011, 38–42). Mälkki (2011, 38) even suggests that it is not "assumptions becoming problematic" as such that triggers reflection but that a "disorienting dilemma is experienced through unpleasant feelings".

Furthermore, shared meaning perspectives—or the shared parts of personal webs of meanings (see Keisala 2012)—contribute to creating and maintaining social bonds and feelings of belonging and being accepted (Hoggan, Mälkki & Finnegan 2016, 55–56). Correspondingly, "meanings becoming questioned or changed indicates a strain also in relation to the people and groups connected by shared assumptions" (Mälkki 2012, 221). Therefore, critical reflection and self-reflection may, again, lead to experiencing unpleasant emotions (see Mälkki 2011, 32–33; Mälkki 2012). In addition, they may have social consequences. For instance, Brookfield (2015, 61–62) calls it "cultural suicide" when, as a result of being seen as changing, someone having participated in learning is punished by their social group. Yet, social consequences, such as new kinds of misunderstandings, contradictions and disagreements with significant others, accompanied by unpleasant feelings, may again serve as "second-wave triggers" for further reflection (Mälkki 2012).

Indeed, like our ways of understanding the world, neither are our emotions separate from the world external to us. Emotions can be considered as socially constructed at least to some extent and related to the ongoing flow of events (Fineman 2000, 11; Keisala 2017, 41, 44; Simpson & Marshall 2010). For this reason, emotions carry the potential to provide meaningful information not only about our own meaning perspectives but also about our social surroundings and the context of interaction (see also Keisala 2017, 44–45), as visible in part of the interview data as well. It may be useful to reflect, e.g., on what emotions potentially tell about the situation, dominant assumptions and practices, roles or work culture, or about the social, economic and political context in which these elements are produced (Keisala 2017, 44–45)—that is, about the categories introduced above, too.

12 Mezirow (1990, xvi) defines the concept of meaning perspective as "[t]he structure of assumptions that constitutes a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of an experience."

13 Yet, edge-emotions do not necessarily signify the need to change one's assumptions as such (Mälkki 2011, 41–42).

7 Is there room for reflection? The interplay between stability and dynamism

As some of the interviewees also brought to the fore, the characteristics of action and challenging security situations in crisis management leave no room for negotiating certain roles, practices or the chain of command. A common ground of meanings and practices then is about these roles and practices being clear to everyone involved. Keisala (2012, 181–182) points out that despite the ideals sometimes associated with the so-called third culture—that is, another way of conceptualising the shared and jointly created ground of meanings and practices guiding interaction (see, e.g., Saastamoinen 2009, 59)—in practice it is not always equal for every interlocutor: "the main thing is that everyone knows the expectations, assumptions and rules defining interaction" (Keisala 2012, 181, *transl.*). According to one of the interviewees however, this has not been obvious to some crisis management experts at the outset. Even if the roles and practices could not be modified, the significance of communication in making them clear to all thus becomes underlined: for the common ground of meanings and practices to be shared, it must be perceived by each party, jointly maintained and constantly reconstructed through acting upon it, too. This applies to the objectives of some tasks and of the operation as well: as pointed out by some of the interviewees, the goal needs to be clarified and the vision maintained.

The role of communication was highlighted also in some other accounts that addressed non-negotiable issues. One of the interviewees illustrated that even though the chain of command can be considered to exist "exactly for the reason that everything does not need to be explained to everyone", giving reasons for actions is helpful in motivating those involved. Another interviewee emphasised that conversations may be important to collegial collaboration even if "in a position, one has to do what the position requires" and one could not make compromises because of the regulations guiding their duty. Without these conversations, according to the interviewee, the collegial dimension necessary in operations would be "tenuous". Thus, the idea of advocacy and inquiry may be valuable even if it would not result in a genuine agreement and even if that was not a necessary prerequisite for action. This highlights the significance of interaction skills in various positions, hierarchical ones included.

As the examples above reveal, even if certain structures appear stable and given, they do not necessarily remain uncontested or undiscussed. Moreover, some interplay between dynamism and stability appears to occur in practice. For instance, the analysis of peace interventions conducted by Autesserre (2014b, 25) challenges the "assumption that instructions from capitals and headquarters automatically translate into corresponding action in the field". An expert interviewed for this article described following the rules as interpreting the situation and as efforts of the personnel members to find a consensus through joint reflection and conversation: according to this interviewee, "the rule book written in Brussels in completely safe, completely functioning circumstances" does not always correspond to the post-conflict, rather fragile state of the host society as such. The ways of implementing the instructions then inevitably become subject to interpretation instead of being absolute, which may expand the room and the need for reflection both as an internal and a collective process. In addition to interpretation and implementation taking place in the field, based on previous research, sometimes instructions appear to be circumvented or rejected (see Autesserre 2014b, 28) and the chain of command bypassed (see Pylvänäinen 2020, 68).

Furthermore, although sometimes limited to its extreme, the room available for joint reflection, negotiating reality or giving reasons for actions may vary according to the situation. An interviewee specifically considered it as a problem in hierarchical operations that inclusive and participatory ways of creating a shared understanding are sometimes missing. The interviewee called for everyone's chance to participate and raised team meetings as an instance in which everyone's views could be expressed. Another interviewee, too, highlighted the importance of opportunities and safe spaces for the exchange of views and argued that "If there is a very hierarchical system in which the boss says that it is to be done this way and everyone else disagrees, but no one dares to say it aloud, the result is very bad."

8 Anticipatory reflection

As the room for joint reflection is often limited, finding the right time, place and manner for raising a topic for discussion is crucial. This task was described as "very difficult" by one of the interviewees. In most participant accounts, reflection appeared as a valuable tool in confronting this challenge. First, reflection would help to better grasp the bigger picture and one's own contribution to it. This sort of a holistic understanding of the mission, the current situation and how one's own role and stance relates to them was also seen to represent respect for others and their views, as it would help to refrain from pushing one's own opinion excessively. Reflection, together with observation, was also described as providing a deeper understanding of the reasons behind current practices. As one interviewee noted, "It is good maybe to hold off a little as, quite often, there are, even if it feels that what is done does not make any sense, still there are certain backgrounds and certain reasons why things are done exactly in this way." Secondly, in consideration of the bigger picture, future-oriented *anticipatory reflection* (see, e.g., Van Manen 1995, 34; Raelin 2001, 19) would then serve as a way to plan an appropriate time, manner and place to potentially raise a topic and consider the social dynamics between the interlocutors in advance. This includes endeavours to assess the consequences of various potential actions—the effect on the social relations in the work community included.

Without a well-functioning induction and official knowledge management structures, gaining knowledge is "left in one's own hands".

However, as for support for gaining a holistic understanding of an operations' functioning, one of the interviewees identified a severe lack of induction for new personnel members: when addressing, e.g., a headquarters' structure in terms of various positions and their responsibilities as well as finding sources for further knowledge, the interviewee depicted that "no one really provided any tools for that". Without a well-functioning induction and official knowledge management structures, gaining knowledge is "left in one's own hands". The significance of one's personal networks and activity in gaining knowledge in general was mentioned in some other accounts as well.

9 Critical reflection on the role of the context as "a constitutive force"—creating safe spaces

As already mentioned, the interviewees repeatedly reflected on interaction in relation to the contextual categories introduced in the second section. In addition to shedding light on factors affecting interaction, this kind of reflection appeared to be utilised to make sense of one's own and the other's behaviour or reactions. When one realises the influence of contextual, situational and background factors on the interlocutors, this insight may contribute to developing a more understanding attitude towards others: A participant noted that "it is difficult to start judging if you do not, like, know the complete picture." Another interviewee found that reflection can improve the ability to feel empathy—on the other hand, this interviewee considered it holds the potential to strengthen negative views, as well. Furthermore, reflecting on the other's assumptions and on how these assumptions are potentially influenced by previous life experiences may aid understanding and enduring a situation in which a contradiction at the social level remains, as a wider frame for comprehending the situation may be built or hypothesised through reflection (see Mälkki 2012, 222–223).

Moreover, when approaching the context as "a constitutive force" rather than a mere scene of interaction (see Broome & Collier 2012, 253), its constitutive character and dynamism can be approached in a proactive way, e.g., by creating safe spaces for interaction. An interviewee described a transfer of interaction into another micro-context as an effort to expand the other interlocutor's chances of expressing their thoughts:

> *– – [S]o I attempt to, if I see that there is a smart person who has a lot to offer but because of their position (they) cannot say much, so as I said (earlier) that you have to create this kind of a safe environment, so I create the occasion that we go and have a cup of coffee or somehow detach from the context so that I get them too to express their thoughts and that valuable experience and competence that they have. So (the person or the conversation) has to be somehow taken away from the general situation and then I can again use the civilian card there.*

By the civilian card the interviewee is referring to the chance provided by the interviewee's civilian status to, in a way, strip military or police ranks of their power: "I just pretend that I simply don't know what the rank means so I can get rid of it." This way, both by influencing the immediate context of interaction and by calling a specific aspect related to their own background into play, the interviewee alters the way the power relations are manifest in the situation and creates a space in which it is acceptable for the other person to express their thoughts openly. Similarly, when addressing difficulties in reaching a shared understanding within a unit, the interviewee illustrated the transfer of the conversation to another environment, or, in consideration of "the dynamics between people", potentially bringing together two units to discuss a common topic, as concrete means to create a space which would be supportive to constructive interaction.

As these accounts reveal, awareness of and critical reflection on the constitutive role that situational, contextual and background factors play in shaping positions, power relations and interaction may lead to anticipatory reflection and increased agency, at least to some extent; at the same time, possibilities for action are still not independent from positions and power relations. Boud and Walker (1998, 197–198) describe, originally with respect to promoting reflection in professional education, that the context cannot be set aside but the ways in which it is manifest can be "made the subject for exploration". In her article on intercultural communication and peacebuilding, Collier (2016, 15), in turn, considers reflexivity and reflective practice crucial i.a. in addressing intersectionality and recognising "levels of privilege, status positioning, equity, inclusion, and justice".

Awareness of the constitutive (see Broome & Collier 2012, 253) and embedded (see Boud & Walker 1998, 197–198) role of the context, as well as recognising one's potential share in affecting the micro-context or finding alternative interpretations then brings—or, rather, sheds light on—responsibility, as well. For instance, when it comes to interaction between the operation personnel, an interviewee argued that superiors in particular, but also colleagues, are responsible for creating a safe space for interaction.[14] The need for a safe space is further emphasised when dealing with difficult topics and concerns; according to the interviewee, in crisis management operations "people have a certain responsibility for each other's well-being." This is not to reduce the significance of appropriate and safe mission procedures and structures through which concerns can be dealt with—a topic the importance of which was also addressed by the same interviewee. These structures are, obviously, part of the context too.

While critical reflection may be valuable in creating safe spaces, safe spaces may then further encourage the actualisation of reflection. In educational sciences a safe and accepting social context is often considered to support reflection (see, e.g., Hoggan et al. 2017, 56; Jokikokko 2009; Mälkki & Green 2016, 172). As for collective reflection, an atmosphere of trust is seen as a prerequisite for it (Keisala 2012, 207). The feeling of being accepted may reduce the defence against recognising one's own assumptions (Mälkki 2011 as cited in Hoggan et al. 2017, 56), and, according to Boud and Walker (1998, 200), "A good reflective space or micro-context requires a level of trust commensurate with the levels of disclosure which might reasonably be expected." This highlights the significance of trust-building between operation personnel, between the personnel and other international agents, and between crisis management experts and locals if collective reflection or building a shared understanding through negotiating reality are sought.

14 Similarly, although with respect to professional education, Boud and Walker (1998, 198) argue: "[t]eachers and learners also need to take personal responsibility for creating micro-contexts and alternative readings of contexts which permit a wider range of exploration and learning than might otherwise be possible – –".

10 Discussion

Based on the exploration above, reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection hold the potential to help build a shared understanding at the micro level in civilian crisis management. They provide tools for recognising, examining and dealing with the uniqueness and complexity of each interlocutor, including oneself; their ways of perceiving, thinking and behaving; the changing and dynamic contexts of interaction; and the identities, representations, relationships and power structures shaped by and constructed in these contexts. Similarly, Collier (2016, 25) argues "one of the ways to account for the complexities of the context, culturally diverse identifications and representations, – – and intersecting dimensions of personal, relational and structural factors, is the praxis of reflexivity". At the same time, the approach is challenging and, at the micro level, requires "personal mastery" (see Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005, 77).

Potential means of supporting and facilitating the practice of reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection as well as encouraging the development of the abilities needed in these processes of reflection therefore are topics worth examining and discussing. These abilities include becoming aware of, understanding and dealing with unpleasant emotions that arise when one's assumptions become questioned[15] (Mälkki 2010, 56; Mälkki 2011, 38–42) or potentially when critical reflection and self-reflection lead to viewing wider dimensions, such as practices and power relations (Keisala 2017, 45). As approaching context as "a constitutive force" (see Broome & Collier 2012, 253) implies and cases in this article indicate, attention should also be paid to contextual, structural and situational factors—e.g., to processes, practices, structures and safe spaces which allow and enable critical reflection and constructive interaction.

The potential advantages of reflection and reflexive abilities in civilian crisis management, however, do not only concern interaction. As one interviewee commented, it is extremely difficult to train civilian crisis management experts in advance to respond to all potential situations. This remark highlights the importance of developing capacities to learn, to deal with changing and unexpected situations and to construct a strategy of action appropriate in the specific situation, not only relating to interaction but also to other activities and processes more broadly. Luoma and Mälkki's (2009, 119) argument, although originally made concerning military pedagogy and the unexpected situations of war, applies here as well: "– – our meaning perspective and the related edge-emotions appear as the very source to be worked on in order to prepare for the unexpected." Anttila (2012, 187) raises the significance of reflective abilities in support of learning and adaptation processes needed both during and after a deployment. Collier (2016, 25–26), in turn, goes further and considers reflexivity "as a foundational commitment in peacebuilding": according to her, reflexivity is "central in that we all bring a range of identifications, representations, ideological biases, and social justice sensibilities into tension and conversation to increase the relevance and sustainability of peacebuilding". Together with Broome (see Broome & Collier 2012), she argues reflexivity is "essential to confront the challenges of peacebuilding, collaboratively design relevant and sustainable interventions, and identify when it is time to step back or step out for good" (Collier 2016, 18).

15 The mere control of edge-emotions is not enough: it may even become counterproductive if it steals one's focus and thus restricts thinking (see Luoma & Mälkki 2009, 118).

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