CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS OF MILITARY OPERATIONS – THE USE OF FOCUSED INTERVIEWS IN MILITARY SCIENCES

Key words
focused interviews, qualitative methods, military sciences, crisis management

Abstract

Methodological debates in relation to study individuals may be emerging in military sciences. The methodological choice may have an impact on the results. Changing environments of military operations affect soldiers’ working reality. Understanding of these changes may also require methodological consideration. The present article examines interviews of crisis management personnel. The analysis of interview excerpts shows what kind of knowledge may be created through conducting focused interviews and analyzing them. Interview methods can be used for providing information and deeper knowledge about military crisis management personnel’s thinking and roles in relation to crisis management. The results of interviews are compared with the idea of potential outcome and limits of using a survey method. Using qualitative interviews provides opportunities to construct understanding of new phenomena which is important for the development of military sciences. The specific features of military sciences when using qualitative methods are also discussed.

Aim of the article

This article analyzes whether method choices have an impact on the outcome of the research. The methods are also reflected in the context of the changes of military operations. Focused interviews are introduced as an example of qualitative methods.

The present article focuses on three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How can the use of qualitative interviews help create knowledge about soldiers’ working reality in crisis management?
RQ2: Can qualitative interviews enlarge the knowledge that is provided through using quantitative methods?

RQ3: Do military sciences differ from social and behavioural sciences in the methodology for studying individuals?

The argumentation in this article is based on a literature analysis and results from interviews that were conducted for my dissertation in 2008. Answers to the research questions will be introduced at the end of the article.

**Changing environments of military operations**

The major trend in warfare has been a decline in the proportion of interstate wars (Ramsbotham et al. 2008, Kaldor 2012). Contemporary armed conflicts are typically internal wars or conflicts with non-state actors involved, and many of them appear to be of continuous nature (Kaldor 2012). Therefore, security risks cannot only be analysed in the context of national security but it is necessary to understand armed conflicts’ influence on the civilians involved. It has led to the conceptualisation of human security signifying the security concept to be enlarged into the context individuals. This change requires that individuals’ human rights in security discourses should be strengthened and seen as a main focus of security policy. (Kaldor 2007.) Currently, the concept of human security has also been applied to broader contexts, for example, to the analysis of climate change and environmental issues that requires understanding of both environmental and social sciences (see O’Brien & Barnett 2013).

Today’s peace operations are more challenging than the so-called traditional peace operations that mostly focused on ensuring the maintenance of an achieved peace agreement. Challenges in contemporary peace operations are manifold: on the other hand it is necessary to have the capability to carry out a robust peace operation and on the other hand, peace-building requires the capacity to create trust and work with local inhabitants in order to facilitate constructing new administration and democratic structures. (Ramsbotham et al 2008; Norgaard & Holsting 2006.)

Generally, a peace operation is carried out by a multitude of actors, both civilian and military ones, due to which the management and administration of the
operation can become a complexity. A peace operation is usually temporary in its nature, and even in more permanent forces commanders, officers and soldiers are rotated (Elron et al. 2003, 263). Due to these challenges and the demanding nature of the duties, the roles of the military involved in peace processes have become more complex than they used to be at the time of traditional peace operations (Ramsbotham et al. 2008).

Military cultures and traditions differ from one another, even though the operational mandates restrict the use of force and unify and direct operations. Foreign troops’ competence and will to work for trust-building is essential for local ownership. Their roles in providing security may also be unclear to local inhabitants. Understanding local people’s interpretations of the operation is necessary for ensuring the legitimacy of the operation (Pouligny 2006).

Research may help understand the reality of individuals involved in contemporary armed conflicts. Potentially there are numerous groups involved with an armed conflict: a state with its armed forces, citizens of the country, non-state armed groups, and humanitarian agencies. If a civilian, military or combined intervention takes place, several UN and other agencies and a military operation will start to fulfil their mandates. In military sciences, understanding challenges of contemporary armed conflicts to military actors is of importance. Methodological questions may also be analyzed in this context: what kinds of methods may improve opportunities to get new knowledge to better understand the new realities of contemporary warfare? Due to the new challenges, a large spectrum of methods may provide a wider range of knowledge, even though method choices need to be assessed in relation to research questions of any study.

For understanding the complexity of peace-building and crisis management, it is necessary to analyze personnel’s adjustment which requires the use of several methods. It is important to analyze individuals’ thinking and actions in armed conflicts and today’s soldiers learning in crisis management. Therefore, developing the use of research methods is of importance in military sciences when analyzing the contextual changes of roles of the military and the individuals involved. Methodological choices need to be considered in the context of research questions and themes.
Because different functions of armed forces require various capabilities and competences to a certain extent, these contextual differences are meaningful to the individuals involved. The contexts of national defence, support activities to civilian authorities and military crisis management constitute different environments for personnel. Studying different environments and their significance has also an impact on the methodological choices.

**Applying methods of social sciences**

Military sciences are a new branch of research that can be defined as applied sciences (Huhtinen 2002). Applied sciences are based on the results of basic research, and they focus on scientific applications or practical solutions (Niiniluoto 1999, 13). Therefore, they usually apply scientific methods that are used in other sciences. When analyzing individual soldiers’ realities, research methods of social sciences, psychology and pedagogy can be applied to this context. Social sciences’ methods for collecting data on individuals are rich. Doing empirical research extends to the interpretation of the material because a single finding or a number of statistics remains meaningless without contextualization and interpretation.

A methodology refers to decisions made about cases to study, methods of data gathering, forms of analysis and similar issues when planning and executing a research study (Silverman 2006, 15). The methodological discourse in military sciences may be rising. For example, the publishing of the book “Qualitative methods in military studies. Research experiences and challenges” (2013) can be interpreted to signify an increasing interest in methodological questions within military sciences.

In social sciences, there is a distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods. The use of quantitative methods in social sciences is often close to a positivist view that emphasizes that the results of social sciences should be measurable and that the measurement can be developed in similar ways like in natural sciences. In positivism, the ideal of natural sciences and explanation within them is also a model to other sciences (Kakkuri-Knuuttila & Heinlahti 2006, 146). In practice, quantitative methods often refer to survey questionnaires, for example, the data of which can be analysed through statistical methods. Qualitative methods are often related to a non-positivist perspective on the research of human beings. Quantitative and qualitative methods can also be seen to make a continuum
(Alasuutari 1999). The ends of the continuum can be described as ideal types of doing the research. The other end means modelling a test in natural sciences and the other end resolving a riddle (ibid.).

Historically, qualitative methods have also been relevant as the phase of a pre-research that would be followed by a study conducted by quantitative methods (Mäkelä 1992, 42). In some research processes, qualitative and quantitative phases occur depending on the results that may direct the research process to a new path. Therefore, using a certain method is not necessarily linked to a certain kind of epistemology. However, qualitative researchers often criticize the narrow use of quantitative research because it may leave the social and cultural construction of the “variables” neglected (Silverman 2002, 5).

Using different methods, namely both qualitative and quantitative ones in the same research, signifies using mixed methods. For some methodologists in social sciences, it is appropriate to combine methods, but for some researchers, there is still a strong border between using qualitative and quantitative methods. This distinction in relation to the use of methods means a pre-paradigmatic difference between different methodological branches of social sciences. (Bryman 2008). Because the borderline between qualitative and quantitative methods divides social scientists, it is necessary to be aware of the relevance of methodological questions in relation to epistemological differences that prevail. For a large number of social scientists, nevertheless, the methodological decisions are derived from research questions and procedures, and therefore, qualitative and quantitative methods may be combined in relation to their relevance to the research questions.

In pedagogy, the use of qualitative methods became common in the 1970s, but their breakthrough took place at the end of the 1980s (Syrjäläinen et al. 2007, 7). Since the 1990s, qualitative methods have achieved a strong role in social sciences regardless their relation to the use of quantitative methods. In a way, methods in social sciences can be described in terms of “generations”, because tendencies to choose certain kinds of methods vary in accordance with time span. (See Alastalo 2005.) Many researchers make a clear distinction between the criteria for validity when using qualitative or quantitative methods. However, the validity can also be seen in the context of the knowledge that is intended to be found due to the results. (Hammersley 2008.)
**Focused interviews and qualitative research**

There is a broad spectrum of qualitative research methods, and therefore, the field of qualitative research is fragmented and challenging to deal with (Syrjäläinen et al. 2007, 10). Qualitative methods consist e.g., of interviews, ethnography, monitoring and action research. Using interview methods have many advantages in comparison to other methods in social sciences. For example, in comparison to survey methods, interviews are more flexible (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2004).

It is also relevant to analyze, whether some methods might be better in “truth-seeking”, namely creating knowledge. Because interviews that consist of interaction and spoken language may reveal some aspects that cannot be revealed as freely as an outcome of survey research, they may be better from this perspective. As Gün Semin (1997) describes, words are “the most important glue of social reality”. Reality is not always foreseeable and it may contain aspects that are surprising and deviant (Pickering 1989 & 1992, ref. Miettinen 2000). Regarding research on human beings and social behaviour, it is therefore important to conduct such methodological practices that ensure the validity of knowledge obtained through the research.

There are several types of interviews. Interviews may be well structured, and, therefore, resemble survey methods and, therefore, structured interviews are mostly part of quantitative research. On the other side of the continuum, interviews can be completely unstructured. Focused interviews combine both of these aspects. They are structured but allow the interviewees also to talk freely about their associations related to the interview themes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2006). Focused interviews are part of qualitative research, although they may be, to some extent, analysed as data collected from survey questionnaires. In the empirical part of the present article, the use of focused interviews is introduced to represent qualitative methods. As visualized in the figure 1., below, quantitative methods are more used in studies that are theory-based, and on the other hand, focused interviews and unstructured interviews can be used in studies that are more data-based in such ways that enable to create new theories or at least to supplement them with the results derived from new data. This end of the continuum may lead to the grounded theory, a branch of qualitative research, in which any new theory is derived from the data.
Interviews are based on human interaction in which the role of the language is crucial. Therefore, the roles of the interviewer and interviewees are important and have impacts on the outcome of the interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2006, 48-49.) The interview can be seen as construction of knowledge and mutual exchange of views, and multi-sensory channels including verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard can be included in the process that also gives space to spontaneity (Cohen et al., 2007, 349). By using interviews, it is easier to contextualize the interviewees’ messages to wider environments. Interviewees are allowed to be real subjects in the research process. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2006, 35.) Therefore, interviews may open opportunities to widen the analysis in comparison to the use of standardized questionnaires.

Interviews are open to different interpretations on behalf of the participants of the process. They are collaborative and meaning-making experiences involving both interviewers and interviewees (Hiller & DiLuzio 2004, 2). Because interviews are social encounters, they also include phenomena that are typical to everyday life and that affect then interview process although not related to interview themes. However, with skilfulness, these types of bias can be controlled. (Cohen et al. 2007, 349-350.)

Regarding qualitative data, the analysis is interpretative. The researcher reflects the data and makes interpretations after having classified it. The analysis proceeds stage by stage, and the analysis of the data is considered to be the most challenging part of the research process. (Cohen et al. 2007, 368; Syrjäläinen et al 2007.) The analysis is clearer if the material is listed and categorized, the interpretation
processes are divided to phases and the rules of interpretation and problem-solving are made clear.

There is no single way to analyze qualitative data like focused interviews. Structured interviews - and to a certain limit less structured ones as well - may also be condensed and coded. The analysis of qualitative interviews can be based on classifications that may be coded into numerical modes. There is software to be used for this purpose, and the computer-based data-analysis can be extended to combine qualitative and quantitative data (Fielding & Fielding, 2008). Each analysis of the data is unique and dependent on the nature of the data.

Classification of different methods in social sciences and pedagogy vary. Sirkka Hirsjärvi and Helena Hurme (2006) classify focused interviews as a method. On the other hand, content analysis that can be used for the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data can also be categorized as method (see Domas White & Marsh, 2006). Content analysis proceeds from the categorization and classification of the content of the texts to their interpretation (Cohen et al. 2007). Content analysis can be described as a method for the analysis of different texts. However, the interpretation of the data relies on the analysis of the researcher: the analysis methods can facilitate finding interpretations that, however, depend on the knowledge of the research and the framework of the study. In qualitative analysis, there are also different traditions how to analyze and interpret interviews or any other material (see Burr 2003).

**Sensitive and unique methodological aspects in military sciences**

Helena Carreiras and Celso Castro (2013) have edited a book “Qualitative Methods in Military Studies”. The focus of the book is on unique and sensitive issues in the use of qualitative methods in military sciences. Many articles in this book introduce and analyze results from interview studies and scrutinize the challenges in relation to these methods.

Castro and Carreiras (2013) are concerned about a dilemma that may prevail when studying the military. Those who work within military institutions have an easier access to study military personnel but they may be at the risk of having restrictions related to the topics which they can focus on. However, researchers who work in
independent institutions in relation to the military may have major difficulties to get a permission to study the military and the individuals involved.

In the military context, the gender of the researcher or the interviewer may also play a major role. According to Carreiras and Alexandre (2013), it is impossible to eliminate the effect of gender, but it is possible to control this impact by carefully analyzing the research process in its full extent and by being able to identify the potential bias in the collected material. Understanding the potential impact of gender when planning the research is, therefore, important.

Some of the findings from the book introduced above are also relevant when doing quantitative research. When doing quantitative research, the dilemma between being an “outsider” or an “insider” in relation to the military may also prevail. Regarding gender issues, the role of the researchers is not necessarily as important as when doing qualitative research at least, if it includes interviews. Interviews require face-to-face contacts which make the gender issue more visible.

The views introduced above do not necessarily have an impact on methodological choices. However, they affect the ways how the interviews and other methodological choices are carried out and how the data are analyzed. Sensitivity for understanding the role and meaning of the gender as well as the insider or outsider role of the researcher in relation to the military is important in any research process in military sciences requiring methods that include interaction with military personnel (e.g. interviewing or ethnography).

**Methodology: interview process in the present study**

The interviews for this article were made in 2008, and they are analyzed and partly re-analyzed for this article to be an example of the use of interview method. The reinterpretation is based on the idea to assess whether these interviews provide information that might be difficult to achieve by using some other methods, in this case, a survey method. The results have been reported earlier in the author’s doctoral thesis (see Anttila 2012).

The chosen interview method was focused interviews (see Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2006). This means that the interviews were half-structured. Therefore, the interviews were both comparable to one another due to the similarities of the
interviews’ structures as well as they allowed the interviewees to tell openly about their such personal experiences that were associated with the research questions even though not especially asked by the interviewer. The author of this article was the interviewer in all the interviews. All the interviewees were Finns and the interviews were carried out in Finland.

The interviewees were nine professional officers of the permanent staff in the Finnish Defence Forces (all men) who had experience with peacekeeping, and ten peacekeepers recruited from the reserves (five women and five men). Altogether the number of interviewees was 19. The average age of the reservists was 33 years, and the professional officers from the sample were somehow older, namely their average age was 38 years.

Due to the conscript system in Finland, Finnish peacekeepers have been traditionally mostly recruited from the reserves. Recently, the proportion of recruitments from the reserves has not been as high as it used to be. The interviewees had served in KFOR in Kosovo as peacekeepers. Although representatives of civilian crisis management personnel were interviewed for the original study, these interviews have been excluded from the present analysis.

At the time of the interviewing, most of the interviewees had just finished their missions and some of them were continuing. One interviewee had finished her mission more than a year before interviewing. Professional officers in military crisis management had 6-12-month contracts in Kosovo. The average length of service among the professional officers was nine months, and among the reservists it was 11 months. For most of the interviewees, the operation in Kosovo was the first service in peace-keeping. The interviews were focused on personnel’s experiences during a crisis management mission as well as on their interpretations of the events that had taken place. Because the interviews of the study were broad, only some excerpts of them are introduced in this article.

When facing the interviewees as a researcher and interviewer, I was a doctoral student at the National Defence University of Finland and a representative of female gender. Due to the status of a doctoral student, it was easy get the permission to do the interviews for the present study. However, although it is a difficult for me to assess whether the institutional norms of the National Defence University affected my research questions or not, I do not personally think so. It is
a question of some further study to assess how much the research institutes affect the research of orientation of single researchers in military sciences.

Even though I have thought about the role of the interviewer’s gender when analyzing the data, it is impossible to know how different the interviews would have been if the interviewer would have been a representative of the male gender. At least, I do believe that the interviewees expressed their views quite freely in the interviews. How much this depended on the interviewer’s gender, behaviour or the fact that the interviewer was not an officer is a question that cannot be answered. However, I had such an impression that the conversations in the interviews reached confidentiality and some aspects of criticism were more easily spoken to a person who was not any official representative of the armed forces. It is important to acknowledge that focused and unstructured interviews are also an outcome of informal communication that can be influenced by several factors the significance of which may be difficult to assess.

Results

The interview structures of the present study were modified after the first interviews because the role of the feedback, return arrangements were emphasized by the interviewees. Many interviewees found returning home to be more challenging than leaving for a crisis management mission abroad. Some interviewees were definitely more worried about their colleagues wellbeing when returning home than their own coping. However, the theme was important also to them. At least at the time of the interviewing, return arrangements were an important topic for peacekeepers. For many interviewees, even though they had not needed any therapy, the changes related to their return had been somehow stressful.

Peacekeeping duties are special, and individuals who work in a crisis management operation and the ones who stay at home change in different pace. As one professional officer describes the situation:

Interviewee: “… that peacekeeping world is like a shadow world, so that in a way it is not a real world…”
Interviewer: ”Yes”
Interviewee: ”…like a terminal phase for a human being.”
Interviewer: ”Okay.”
Interviewee: ”And it works for a year, for a year. There are changes taking place inside, certainly, and when you return here, in a way you stop. And when you return here, in a way you’ve halted your time.. Interviewer:.”Yes.” Interviewee: ”And it is a shock for many people. …”

In a way, a person may stay in two places like another officer describes:

Interviewee:”So I must say that it is a real shock to return in that way. It is like talking to an empty room , you talk today like... It is like you said earlier that you still have one foot in Kosovo, so I would say… that my body is here completely but I’m obliged to think what is happening there…sometimes, not all the time. Therefore I personally believe that we ought to take some model from Sweden.”
Interviewer: ”Yes.”
Interviewee: ”They have a system in which when they return from an international operation, the operation continues one week in their homeland.”

Many interviewees criticized the insufficient arrangements of feedback. Personnel working for crisis management need more adequate feedback from the institutions, with which they are involved, and the institutions require feedback from the personnel who they have recruited. In some interviews, the institutional insufficiency to provide positive feedback and to analyse the gathered feedback material was also criticized. Sufficient and adequate feedback arrangements are essential for developing learning organizations, and therefore, this issue and the methodologies how to study it should be further investigated. After mentioning about the distress related to his return, one professional officer described that the interview process had functioned as feedback:

Interviewee: ”…and there is a need to talk…”
Interviewer: “There is…”
Interviewee: ”In that sense, this is extremely good feedback, this interview.”

Even though the goal of the interviewee when deciding to participate in the interview process had not probably or primarily been to provide anyone feedback, but at least during the interview, he realized that he actually gave feedback by being interviewed. The process of an interview may be dynamic. New ideas may emerge during it due to the confidential interaction of the interviewee and
interviewer and the opportunity to concentrate on the interview theme on behalf of
the interviewee. Therefore, like in this case, the outcome was the feeling of
providing feedback. It is also possible that the interviews gave such an opportunity
to some interviewees to talk about the past experiences that they would have
needed to be arranged by the authorities who take care of the return arrangements
on behalf of the armed forces.

*Interviews leave more space to the respondents than survey questionnaires do.*
Therefore, they may enable new questions and issues to emerge. The theme of
returning home was such a theme and it allowed the interviewees to talk about their
experiences, which they might not have talked about otherwise.

Sometimes a similar and in a way controversial theme may emerge after different
questions. For example, the theme of ethics when providing and interpreting
information that was relevant for the operation emerged. Both underestimating and
overestimating risks may cause potential problems for the security or reasonable
management of an operation. One reservist criticized military culture because it
may lead to the minimization of the information on harmful events shared one’s
superiors:

> Interviewee: “It does not concern them all [military personnel; author’s
comment]. But clearly it’s there that people say that there is a problem – a
problem can be so tricky that it cannot be said to your superiors. In my
opinion, it has been betraying them in quite a bad way. But according to the
soldiers, you are not allowed to talk about it: ‘Don’t make the generals
worried’.”

On the other hand, one professional officer paid attention to his superiors’
unwillingness to take into account the declining risk assessment made by him and
his colleagues:

> Interviewee: “Right, but, over there, the superiors were apparently afraid,
afraid so much that something else could take place.”
Interviewer: ”Yes.”
Interviewee: “… And therefore, some things caused overreaction, and all
this somehow employed [the troops/us] a lot when we were really busy for
some other reasons, too.”
These two comments describe over- and underestimation of risks, presumably for completely different reasons. However, it is noteworthy that these observations of opposite kinds contain criticism to the interviewees’ colleagues or superiors. The first type of criticism is due to the misleading information that causes underestimation of risks, and the latter one focuses on the superiors’ inability to reduce the risk assessment in accordance with the accurate information. My interpretation is such that the interviewees intended to reveal these negative observations because they had been at least somehow distressful and, on the other hand, they felt that the interview situation had been so confidential that they could reveal these problems. At least, in the case of the reservist, it is probable that the non-military background of the interviewer facilitated the communication on an observation that was negative in regard to the operation.

Regarding the themes mentioned above, it is difficult to know whether they would have emerged when conducting any survey questionnaire study. Presumably, the atmosphere of confidentiality cannot be reached by using survey methods even though they may be perceived neutral and, therefore, appropriate. It is an option when an interview takes place, but much depends on the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer: focused or other interviews do not necessarily lead to confidential conversations. Confidentiality in this context requires that the interviewee feels to be respected and gets the floor to express his or her opinions freely, without pressure to answer only questions that have been priority issues of the researcher.

**Answering RQs - working with contradictions and emerging themes**

RQ1: How can the use of qualitative interviews help create knowledge about soldiers’ working reality in crisis management?

Some parts of the interview could have been carried out by using a survey questionnaire. However, we cannot know how much using a different method changes the results. In regard to new phenomena that were not expected when making the research plan, doing interviews can make a difference. New information and deeper understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny may be revealed more easily when interviewing people and allowing them to comment on
the interview themes freely in comparison to make them respond to a questionnaire.

Gathering different kinds of data enable different analytical processes. Different methods may lead to different results, even when sharing the same research focus. Therefore, when working on different themes in military sciences, it is necessary to emphasize the use of different methods in order to guarantee valid and reliable results and broader understanding of various phenomena.

Understanding interviewees’ reality in qualitative interviews deepens the conceptualization of the research. Consistently with Hiller and Diluzio (2004, 20), in this study, the interviews seemed to be intensive experiences to many interviewees. In the present study, participating in the interview seemed to facilitate personal psychological processes on the previous experiences from the crisis management operation.

RQ2: Can qualitative interviews enlarge the knowledge that is provided through using quantitative methods?

Qualitative interviews may help find exceptions or phenomena that may differ from our everyday understanding about the issues under scrutiny. Such issues may not be easily found by using a survey method. Survey methods’ focus on more explicit phenomena may make them as a practical tool for analysing attitudes and thoughts that are easily expressed and clear for the respondent. When working on emerging or contradictory themes or ideas, qualitative interviews may be a good option.

Qualitative interviews can help study phenomena that are meaningful for personnel in crisis management duties. For example, returning home represents a change that is usually more important for the personnel than starting to work in an operation. The question related to return arrangements were somehow “under the official surface” of crisis management operations: individuals involved in crisis management duties appeared to understand more profoundly the meaning of coming home and psychological challenges related to it than did the official system of the armed forces. Even though return arrangements have been developed in the National Defence Forces of Finland since 2008, understanding of the significance of this phase is still to be emphasized.
For military sciences, it is interesting to know how crisis management duties differ from demanding duties in the field of national defence or support work for civilian authorities when individuals involved assess these differences. All these functions are carried out in military organizations and may yield a similar level of the use of technology, for example. Different duties in armed forces may require different skills and competences from the personnel. Collaboration and support to other Finnish authorities make a part of the armed forces’ duties today. Competences in these branches of duties may differ from the competences required in crisis management. Therefore, interviewing soldiers in different branches of military duties may help understand how these duties and differences in them affect military personnel. Strictly analysed, to answer to RQ2 would require doing two research projects simultaneously with qualitative and quantitative research. The results from different methods could only then be compared.

RQ3: Do military sciences differ from social and behavioural sciences in the methodology for studying individuals?

As mentioned earlier, military sciences apply methods that are used in other sciences. Certain questions may be more relevant or sensitive in military sciences than in social sciences in general. It is adequate to take into account the role of the researcher’s gender as well as his or her position in relation to the military. There may also be different meanings for gender when soldiers and civilians are categorized.

The “insiders” may have more easily the access to study military communities but on the other hand, they may have difficulties to maintain their scientific independence. The “outsiders” may have difficulties to study the military face to face. However, research processes are unique and it is important to be aware of these tendencies, even though the personal experiences of the writer of the present study tend to be more multifaceted: studying the military within a military-based institution is not necessarily so restrictive, and understanding the roles of the researcher’s gender is worth of further analysis.

Methodological choices do not depend on the focus on the military, but they may be influenced by the meaning of the research topic. When studying new themes, the use of focused and other qualitative interviews may be flexible and provide better opportunities for more profound understanding of the topic. In a way, the use of
survey questionnaires is “faceless” and does not leave floor for the interaction between the researcher and the individuals who are objects of the study. By providing an opportunity for contribution, the interviewees can become “the subjects of the study”, who may change the presumptions of the researcher.

**Conclusions**

Regarding crisis management operations, using interview techniques may reveal such results that may not be found by using other methods especially by using survey questionnaires. Therefore, interviewing and as part of it focused interviews can be an important method for the development of military sciences.

However, it is important to identify the role of military sciences when studying armed conflicts. As John Keegan (1993) has described, warfare has changed across the history and, today, the world community needs disciplined armed forces to put an end on warfare and to be protectors of civilization. To understand how to carry out effective peace operations to promote sustainable peace is a multidisciplinary challenge. The role of military sciences in responding to this challenge may be essential, and even therefore, there is also a need to analyze the significance and potential of different methods when studying various objects or themes.

Regardless of the pre-paradigmatic wars in social sciences, qualitative methods including focused interviews can provide opportunities for gathering data in relation to crisis management as well as in relation to other functions of the armed forces. Qualitative research can be seen as an umbrella, under which there are different alternatives to use methods (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2004). Using different methods broadens the scope of research. Even though some theoreticians link qualitative research to certain epistemological assumptions, choices between methods can be based on pragmatic or practical reasoning in relation to the RQs of the research.

Methodological choices need to be assessed in the context of research themes. In military sciences, a broad discussion on methods is also needed. For this purpose, the curricula of military academies and universities are essential. If they include a wide range of courses focusing on methodology, new generations of researchers have better opportunities for methodological choices. There are trends for preferring particular methods, and these trends change over time (Alastalo 2005).
Advanced argumentation for using different methods can also lead to the development of military sciences in other aspects.

References


