Crisis, Accountability and Blame Management

Strategies and Survival of Political Office-Holders

Universiteit Utrecht

FÖRSVARSHÖGSKOLAN

CRISMART
Crisis Management Research and Training

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Crisis, Accountability and Blame Management: Strategies and Survival of Political Office-Holders

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Author Curriculum Vitae

Annika Brändström was born in Umeå, Sweden in 1974. She is a PhD candidate at Utrecht University School of Governance and Deputy Director-General of the Crisis Management Secretariat in the Government Offices of Sweden. Annika Brändström received her Bachelor's degree in 1999 and her Master's degree in Political Science at Stockholm University in 2001. She began her career in the Swedish Navy and then joined the Swedish Institute for International Affairs in Stockholm. She was then part of establishing the Center for Crisis Management Research and Training (CRISMART) at the Swedish National Defence University. In 2003 Annika Brändström took her first assignment in the Government Offices of Sweden and has held several positions within the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Defence, Department of Administrative Affairs, and most recently with the Minister of Interior where she is the head of the Crisis Management Secretariat of the Government Offices. She has been a visiting scholar at the Research School of Social Sciences in the Australian National University and has published several articles and book chapters of which some are included in this book.

To Douglas

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Critical events that impact our societies and become labeled as crises occur now and then. Crises are an integral part of our modern world; they are breaking points that disturb our sense of normalcy. Sometimes these challenges to societal structures and governing bodies can forever change our daily lives. Some of these events have been identified and their likelihood and consequences are well known and therefore plans can be made to deal with them. Others hit without any prior warning, or perhaps early warnings were not able to break through the barriers of disbelief or calculated risk-taking. Regardless of their origin, natural disasters, technical failures, antagonistic attacks, and deadly diseases require response and communication from governments and various organizations. Events like these are commonplace today. Some of them are treated as 'normal incidents' that are bound to occur in a vast and complex array of governmental activities. Others spark a blaze of media attention, public emotions, and political upheaval. A common feature is that nearly all of these events and disturbances affecting core societal functions are increasingly deemed intolerable by key stakeholders, the media, and the public at large, and thus are often considered to be social, political or institutional 'crises' (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014).

Crises can have different triggers that shape how they are perceived and responded to. They can be triggered by unforeseen events and natural disasters; for example, the tsunami in South East Asia in 2004, floods and forest fires that regularly strike certain parts of the world, or by the deliberate acts with intentions to do harm such as 9/11 and the recent terror attacks in Paris and Copenhagen. But they can also be triggered by internal factors within technological, administrative and political systems. Examples include the technical breakdowns associated with the Deep Water Horizon accident in the Gulf of Mexico 2010, the failing regulatory policies that fueled the economic crisis in 2008, and political

conflicts and scandals. The classic definition of a crisis assumes the perspective of the individuals or systems that have to deal with them. From that vantage point, crises are experienced as situations that seriously threaten core values or structures, require urgent action, and are highly uncertain in regards to their origins and consequences (Sundelius et al., 1997; Boin et al., 2005).

But crises do more than threaten societal values and structures. They also break down familiar symbolic frameworks that legitimate the existing political and institutional order (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). Whether a crisis is constituted as a sociological, institutional, policy or political problem will determine which response structures should be activated and later on evaluated and held accountable. Crisis management can thus be an activity that takes place within organizational and operative planned response processes (for instance firefighting, police investigations, medical trauma units, military interventions and so on), or an activity that takes place within the top administrative and political structures where existing policies and responses by individual political leaders are in focus (agency responses, parliamentary procedures and cabinet decision-making). Crises and their management can thus take on different characteristics depending on whether they are approached from an institutional/organizational, policy, or political perspective. Besides the fact that crises can be managed on different 'levels', there are also other dimensions that influence crisis events and the accountability processes that follow depending on whether the crises appear to have been caused by external or internal factors. These differences are significant. They will determine who will be pointed out as guilty and where blame will be directed. Furthermore, they will require different types of engagement and strategies by those involved in managing the accountability processes.

Crisis management is challenging for decision-makers because it requires action in uncertain situations where there is a lack of confirmed and reliable information and because the consequences are not always possible to fully assess. Despite this, the public, media, political opposition and other stakeholders will demand that those in charge take action and provide explanations and reassuring information. The desire for careful consideration in formulating responses sometimes collides with the need for swift action and consequently can spark criticism for slow or failed responses. There are also other trade-offs in managing crises. Dealing with such value conflicts implies making decisions about the relative importance of these values, which is a very delicate task. In some cases, such as the deportation of seemingly innocent refugees to a country with a questionable humanitarian reputation, the value conflicts are more obvious (see further chapter 7). In the aftermath these actions or inactions will be scrutinized and debated. Whether tough calls in crisis management are publicly perceived as fair and legitimate is the key to a favorable assessment of the response and the future legitimacy of decision-makers and institutions as well as maintaining public trust (Svedin, 2012).

Regardless of whether it is about evaluating the performance of policy makers or questioning the shortcomings of underlying institutional orders, crises trigger intense public accountability processes (Bovens et al., 2014c; Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). The high-level of scrutiny and strong public emotions involved in a crisis event put significant pressure on the responsible actors to publicly explain and justify their actions as well as display empathy and respect for those who have been affected. For example, Norwegian Prime Minister Stoltenberg faced such pressures after the attacks in Oslo in 2010 when the government quarters had been bombed and a large number of young politicians on summer camp had been brutally murdered. In the heat of the moment, he hit the right notes by expressing his sadness and at the same time his determination to unite the people of the country around the values of openness and inclusiveness in an attempt to fight terrorism. Later on, when the spotlight was turned on and highlighted the deficiencies in the performance of the police and other agencies prior to and during the day of the attacks, Stoltenberg remained untouched but his government received serious criticism.

The post-crisis accountability process can also be understood as a purification ritual that helps channel public emotions and enables some sort of social and political re-equilibration (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). But at the same time there may be a palpable tension between the twin imperatives of public accountability (scrutinizing performance, identifying flaws, naming culprits and assigning blame) and drawing sensible lessons for future risk and crisis management. Sometimes, the logic of 'managing accountability' can hinder the learning process; for example, when some of the involved parties' just want to 'move on' and refrain from lengthy and painful public investigations. Key actors may fear that exposing the facts might put them or the institutions or policies they represent in unfavorable light. It is not only the factual descriptions that matter when blame and responsibility is assigned. Descriptions of who did wrong and who did right in a crisis situation do not always corresponds with the rational explanations of why a crisis happened. These simultaneous manifestations of a crisis can also gain media attention and public appeal. For instance, attempts to shed light on the decision-making process behind the decision to go to war in Iraq by the British and US governments was never fully achieved and was overshadowed by blame games between decision-makers and agencies that was closely followed and reported by all the national media.

Different accountability 'narratives' are often challenged and their promoters and defenders engage in escalating debates so that their version dominates and is accepted as the truth. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the issue of determining where blame should be placed (i.e., on the local, state or federal actors) for the failure to predict and aptly cope with the consequences of the hurricane was debated nationwide for a long time. At the core of this was the need to establish what went wrong, who should be held responsible, and what should be done about it. Different interpretations, which question the dominant

description of the unfolding events, can create conflict and engage incumbent decision-makers, their opponents, public scrutiny and media attention (Boin et al., 2010; Hood, 2011). These conflicts can have such serious consequences that decision-makers, bureaucratic structures, and policy programs can be hit hard and become targets of great criticism once the acute crisis phase is over.

Crisis-induced accountability processes focus on three key dimensions and questions. Firstly, the *origins* of the crisis: how could this have happened in the first place? Was this a result of a malfunctioning system or bad decisions/policies, or was it an unforeseen 'act of god'? Secondly, the *responses* to the crisis: did "we"/"they" do enough and were the actions appropriate and swift once the crisis had hit full force? Did the responsible authorities take proper action and did the involved agencies perform satisfactorily under pressure? And thirdly, what should be *learned* from this event: what political and policy implications should it have?

There are multiple settings and procedures of post-crisis accountability, with partly distinctive and partly overlapping purposes. They operate according to different rules of the game in the interaction between the forum that demands accountability and passes judgments, and the actors whose behavior is being judged. Crisis-induced accountability processes may include parliamentary and judicial proceedings, public inquiries, technical investigations, mass media, and social media. The careers, reputations, and power of key office-holders drawn into inquiries and proceedings may be significantly affected – often negatively, occasionally positively. President George W. Bush managed to uphold a high-level of trust after 9/11 despite the blame game between federal agencies of who was to blame for failing to foresee and prevent such an attack. Yet, the same president never fully recovered from the criticism he received after Hurricane Katrina. These processes can cast long shadows and push blame up the hierarchy of bureaucracy to the top political/system level if decision-makers are perceived as failing to meet expectations and assume responsibility. After the Srebrenica massacre of civilian Bosnian Muslims in 1995, there were lengthy investigations with the purpose of determining the scope of responsibility and the degree to which the Dutch battalion representing the UN mission had failed to prevent the massacre. These investigations ultimately resulted in the fact that the entire Dutch government was forced to step down in 2002 (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003).

Likewise, the institutional reputation, integrity and continuity of key organizations are at stake. Consider the structural reorganizations that have taken place in response to agencies and policies being held accountable for failure to cope with crisis events such as 9/11 in the US, the consequences of the tsunami in the Nordic countries (see chapter 4), and the major changes to the regulation of financial institutions after the financial crisis beginning in 2007. Finally, crises offer an opportunity to evaluate the continuity of existing policies and programs that can be adapted, changed, and terminated. Several government programs (for

example, weapons export and inspection programs such as the Bofors export affair in Sweden in 1986 (see chapter 7) and the British governments management of the investigations of chemical weapons in Iraq described in the Butler review and Hutton inquiry for instance) have been redesigned after being exposed as unethical or even unlawful and in turn have initiated acute government crises and resignations of top civil servants and politicians.

This study focuses on the high politics of different types of crisis events and the stakes and consequences for public office-holders, in particular responsible ministers. These people are ultimately seen as responsible for making sure that crisis events do not happen in the first place, and if they do occur then these people are expected to manage them effectively. The central focus of our inquiry is on the accountability behavior of high-level office-holders, their interaction with other stakeholders in framing blame, and the consequences for their political futures. It attempts to contribute to the development of new theory. More particularly it takes a deeper look at the dimensions of the crisis-induced blame management of different events and the use of various meaning-making strategies by high-level political leaders and their opponents interacting on the accountability arenas. It attempts to contribute to the ambiguous knowledge on what strategies can really have an effect in influencing the outcomes in such circumstances to and under what circumstances do these strategies seem to be effective or not? For instance, does it matter if a critical event is internal or external, "who" employs the strategies, or "when" they are implemented?

Some leaders seem to thrive and perform even better in the moment under this pressure. When President Clinton was subject to impeachment in the Lewinsky affair he was preoccupied with these troubling events for a long time but his rating polls were as high as ever. Mayor Guiliani in New York after 9/11, also under intense pressure managed to come out not just unscathed but even stronger. In other seemingly similar situations others' political or administrative careers are effectively terminated. Prime Minister Aznar in Spain was voted out of government by the electorate for prematurely placing blame for the Madrid bombings in 2004 on ETA which proved to be an incorrect assumption and a political stunt to avoid allegations implying that the attacks were associated with the Spanish government's decision to get involved in the Iraq War. The majority of the work included in this dissertation was conducted during the mid-2000s and onward. The conceptual model used in the case studies was developed in 2003 and the empirical case studies were published in 2008, 2011 and 2015. The core of this book aims to advance the field of knowledge and it is done by forging links to related fields of literature (ministerial careers, cabinet government) and by conducting a number of empirical studies mainly on Sweden and the Netherlands but also including US and British cases.

1.2 The aim and central research question

The main focus of this book is on how incumbent high-level officials and their opponents deal with crisis-induced accountability processes. The empirical scope is limited to four comparative case studies, which examine a small to medium number of cases. The theoretical scope is broader and aims to contribute to the existing knowledge and understanding of crisis-induced accountability and its potential consequences for individuals and governments. The central research question in this book is: *what accountability demands on political office-holders are triggered by crisis events, how do they manage such demands, and what implications do these have for their political survival?* In my attempts to address this research question, I conducted a number of empirical studies that focused on different aspects of this question. At the outset of this task, a framework for analyzing accountability strategies in terms of framing blame was developed and published in an article, which has not been included in this book (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). That framework was then slightly refined and applied in a number of empirical studies included in this dissertation. After the initial studies focused on the interaction of framing blame it became clear that applying the conceptual framework did not sufficiently account for important contextual factors (mainly pertaining to institutional and individual factors) which seemed significant in constraining or enabling certain responses. In chapters 6 and 7 another theoretical approach was therefore introduced in order to strengthen the framework. Each of the four empirical chapters deals with separate but closely linked questions regarding how blaming processes evolve and the responses to crisis-induced accountability processes.

1.3 Outline of the book

This study forms a compilation of several articles and book chapters that address different aspects of these questions. It is an attempt to contribute to existing theories by providing different explanations for what are the key factors in shaping post-crisis blame management processes and outcomes. The literature in this work was used to construct a conceptual framework for analyzing and assessing the crisis-induced accountability process in which blame management strategies are implemented by high-level political office-holders in a highly politicized environment. Furthermore, issues regarding how these strategies are employed and the contextual and individual factors influencing the success or failure of these strategies, as well as their impact on political careers, have also been considered. The empirical core consists of four separately submitted and published articles and book chapters based on the same analytic framework. Because of this there is considerable but unavoidable overlap in the chapters when describing the theoretical basis and analytic framework.

The study consists of eight chapters. Chapter 2 provides a literature review that comprises the academic foundations and 'state of the art' in the analysis of post-crisis accountability. It covers literature that has been used to develop a conceptual framework and a conceptual model that provides a foundation for both systematic process description and interpretation of empirical cases. In addition, chapter 2 also discusses the most relevant findings and some of the unresolved gaps identified in recent research discussions. Chapter 3 presents the research strategy and methods used in the empirical studies that are to follow. Thereafter, the empirical work is presented in four separate articles and book chapters in chapters 4–7:

Chapter 4: "The politics of tsunami responses: Comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia" [1] This chapter examines the dynamic and political process that follows an external event (i.e., a natural disaster). It offers a comparative view of the different meaning-making strategies used to frame blame by the governments of Sweden, Norway and Finland after the tsunami in Southeast Asia on Boxing Day 2004. The responses and interaction between the governments, key ministers, and their opponents in each of the three countries are discussed in light of the dynamics of crisis-induced blaming processes.

Chapter 5: "Chasing evil, defending atrocities: Blame avoidance and prisoner abuse during the war in Iraq" [2] This work draws upon the same analytical approach presented in chapter 4 but it is applied to two cases of prisoner abuse (i.e., internal events) involving the US and British governments during the Iraqi war. Here, organizational misbehavior in two similar systems is examined, providing the opportunity to compare the management and outcome. Likewise, the ethical aspects of crisis management influencing the accountability process and the use of meaning-making strategies are also discussed.

Chapter 6: "Crisis, accountability, blame management and ministerial careers: The Netherlands" [3] This research builds upon the analysis of meaning-making strategies and the analytic approach presented in chapters 4 and 5. This chapter

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1 This chapter was first published as: Brändström, Annika, Sanneke Kuipers, and Pär Daleus (2008) "The politics of tsunami responses: comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia" In *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning*, edited by Arjen Boin, Allan McConnell and Paul 't Hart. Cambridge University Press.

2 This chapter was first published as: Kuipers, Sanneke, Kasia Kochanska, and Annika Brändström (2011) "Chasing evil, defending atrocities: Blame avoidance and prisoner abuse during the war in Iraq." In *Ethics and Crisis Management*, edited by Lina Svedin. Information Age Publishing.

3 This chapter was first published as: Brändström, Annika and Marij Swinkels (2015) "Crisis accountability and career management in the Netherlands" In *Organizing After Crisis*, edited by Nathalie Schiffino, Laurent Taskin, Celine Donis, and Julien Raone. Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing Group.

focuses on the outcome of crisis-induced accountability processes in various types of crisis events in a political/administrative system with a tradition of coalition governments (i.e., the Netherlands). It brings together the literature on crisis accountability and blame avoidance, drawing upon findings from ministerial tenure research. The conceptual model of blame management is complemented by taking into account the institutional, political and individual circumstances. Together, this offers a better understanding of the contextual and personal factors that highly influence the success or failure of particular meaning-making strategies. Comparisons are made using a number of high-pressure crisis accountability events in the Netherlands.

Chapter 7: "Crisis, accountability, blame management and ministerial careers: Sweden" [4] This article is a continuation in testing the applicability of the conceptual model in examining the outcomes of crisis-induced accountability processes in various types of crisis events within a political/administrative system with a tradition of single-party governments (i.e., Sweden). Here national crisis events in Sweden and the consequences they have had for cabinet ministers and junior ministers are analyzed. The conceptual model juxtaposing two distinct perspectives (as presented in chapter 6) is adapted here with some minor changes that take into account the Swedish political and administrative context.

The findings from the empirical studies are compared and contrasted in chapter 8. Furthermore, this chapter revisits the research question and propositions presented in each of the empirical chapters giving particular focus to those findings that are relevant to theory development with less attention given to the case specific findings. Thereafter, these findings are then reconsidered in relation to the overall aim and research question of this book (presented earlier here in chapter 1) and to the key themes outlined in chapter 2 as well as how these findings contribute to new knowledge and revised research agendas. Chapter 8 concludes the book by reflecting briefly on this general research project and looking ahead at what might be relevant themes for future studies and important lessons learned.

4 This chapter was first published as: Brändström Annika (2015) "Crisis accountability and ministerial resignations in Sweden." Scandinavian Political Studies. Volume 38, Issue 3: 217–320.

Chapter 2: Current perspectives on crisis, accountability and political survival

2.1 Introduction

In this section an overview of the theoretical landscape of crisis, accountability and political survival research will be presented. Different fields of research have focused on answering different questions and therefore developed their own lenses and perspectives to understanding the mechanisms of blame management. Theories of public relations, political science, political psychology, public administration and crisis management all provide their own relevant insights into the accountability and blaming processes that are part of the crisis accountability processes in different events. The inquiry here into crisis-induced blame management will be conceptualized further with the help of some of the most recent contemporary research findings from two of the most pertinent fields of research: political accountability and crisis management. This study connects and builds upon the literature from these two fields.

Each empirical chapter has its own theoretical discussion that is tailored to the particular issue and case at hand. The current chapter places the approach of this study at the intersection between these two collected works and identifies the most relevant findings and theoretical developments from previous studies. It discusses unresolved issues, points out theoretical and empirical gaps, and identifies methodological challenges. This chapter ends by presenting a synthetic conceptual model that serves as a roadmap for exploring the crisis cases.

2.2 Crisis management and accountability

There are several traditions in studying the notion of crisis management as rooted in public administration, social science, political science, and leadership and communication studies. Early crisis studies within comparative politics looked

at crises as critical junctures shaping the development of political systems by examining social upheaval events from riots to the turnover of states and political order (see Rosenthal et al., 1989). International relations scholars provide rich understanding of the contexts in foreign policy crises, where conflicts and war can arise, such as the Korean War in the 50ies and the Bay of Pigs conflict in the 60ies. Such studies have also pointed to the importance of the key actors; that is, the leaders and their bureaucracies. The psychological and cognitive traits of "who leads" are likely to be important in explaining the escalation or termination of critical episodes of conflict, war, and crisis, as pointed out by others (Hermann et al., 2001; Lindgren, 2003; Boin et al., 2012;).

Public administration and public policy scholars have approached critical events, such as crises, from another vantage point. Accidents and disasters are studied as the result of operational and technical failures in safety organizations or cultures. Classic examples are the explosion of space shuttle Apollo 13 in 1970 and the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986 (overview provided in Boin et.al. 2005). Many of these studies give significant attention to the leaders and decision-makers involved but from a decision-making perspective isolated to one particular event. Critical decisions that are taken at particular points in time can change the course of events (see Nohrstedt, 2007). These significant occasions often present difficult choices and dilemmas with which decision-makers have to cope. For instance, governments that want to stop deadly diseases from turning into pandemics have to consider enforcing restrictions that may negatively impact the transportation of goods and people. Short-term mass-inoculations may successfully stop the spreading of a dangerous disease but may also imply unknown negative side-effects in the long-term.

Another common aspect found in crises is that they frequently cast long shadows on the polities in which they occur (see Boin et al., 2008). The sense of threat and uncertainty that they elicit is likely to have profound effects on people's perceptions of the world around them. In the crisis aftermath this can de-legitimize existing institutional arrangements and authority relationships, according to 't Hart (1993; see also Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). For leaders, the prospect of profound changes in the social, political and administrative discourses should be a trigger for actively responding and trying to influence and shape the outcomes. Crisis events are also commonly conceptualized around three key characteristics that will trigger incumbent leaders to respond (see chapter 1). They pose a serious threat to core values, create a sense of urgency, and are highly uncertain as to their origin and consequences (Sundelius et al., 1997; Stern, 2003; Boin et al., 2005). The approach in this book follows the same standpoint. Crisis episodes are instances of intense, dynamic political and social processes. They put high pressure on incumbent policymakers regarding decision-making, communicating, and managing accountability.

Current crisis research has emphasized the "political" nature of crises (Boin et al., 2009; Boin et al., 2012). These high intensity events are susceptible to a significant amount of political and social engineering by those who are in place to manage them. Consequently, when examining crisis accountability events one can expect a range of responses including symbolic ones which are far beyond normal operational activities, as pointed out by 't Hart (1993). The political management of crises emphasizes the way in which decision-makers seek to influence the political consequences and policy implications that they may expect from post-crisis investigations, accountability processes, and learning exercises (Boin et al., 2009). Studies focusing on post-crisis accountability show that accountability assignment will have consequences for the political realm during the reconstruction process if the incident is recasted as the product of 'endemic' problems stemming from organizational routines, flawed policies, implementation failures, and/or explicit intervention by key office-holders (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003; Boin et al., 2009). This involves specific representations of the problem, which highlight the responsibility of some and minimize the responsibility of other (f-) actors. For instance, different representations of the temporal dimension will signal if incumbent decision-makers can be held accountable or not. Did the faulty decision or policy implementation take place during their time of duty, or long before when others were in charge and therefore they should be held responsible? Defining the spatial boundaries will indicate if a broad spectrum of actors and organizations were involved in the failure, or if there was a single entity acting that should be held accountable. The importance of political, social and psychological dimensions documented in crisis research show that the identification of a policy failure is a political act and not a true representation of facts (see Edelman, 1988; Bovens and 't Hart, 1996; Boin et al., 2009). Framing is key in creating and communicating narratives that are used to depict an event (see Edelman, 1977; Schön and Rein, 1994). In classic framing studies, the use of frames as cognitive tools and mental schemes are portrayed as ways to deliberately manipulate audiences' perceptions in order to promote particular narratives or solutions (Goffman, 1974; Gephart, 1993; Hart, 1993). Goffman (1974) in his work on frame analysis distinguishes the 'primary framework' (the unaltered event that has taken place) from crafted "lenses" by which these events come to be understood. Through keying, fabricating and mis-framing the events can be perceived of as something completely different. De Vries (2004) applies frame analysis to several crisis events and finds that policymakers' active engagement in framing activities is effective in fending off responsibility and blame. According to De Vries, strategic and deliberate framing strategies are more common during crisis events than other tactics; for instance, initiating institutional changes and reforms as suggested by others (see for instance Boin et al., 2009). De Vries' (2004) meta-structure provides a useful oversight of how frames of policy or actor failures are connected to particular communication strategies and outcomes in terms of assigning accountability.

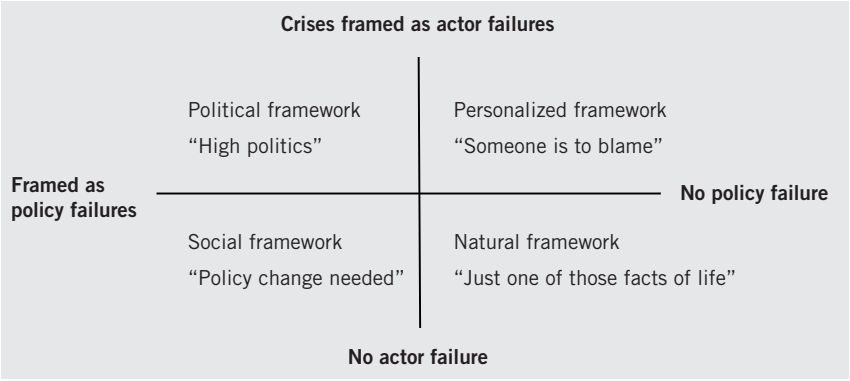

Figure 2.1: The framing of crisis (De Vries, 2004)

The message from crisis research is that it is crucial for top leaders to master the ability to communicate with their peers, opponents, mass media, the public, and other societal actors holding power (Boin et al., 2005). Studies of crisis communication, impression management, and political marketing also support this view (see Strömbäck, 2007; Coombs, 2011). Studies of corporate responses to crisis events further underscore this (Hearit, 2006). Credibility is widely recognized as a key asset in situations where there are competing crisis frames. There is a distinct strand of research on organizational reputation that is concerned with reputational 'threats' and effects on agency behavior and output (see Carpenter, 2010; Maor, 2015). Public agencies act adaptively, strategically, and opportunistically in developing and maintaining good reputations. Similar to frame analysis, studies of reputation management show the interactive nature of relationships between agency and public. Interaction is carefully designed and able to manipulate and shape external audiences' opinions. Research suggests that intense negative media coverage will lead to active responses when an agency experiences low agency output or when it concerns areas where reputation is weaker (Maor, 2015; Maor and Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2015). This further underscores the "shielding" effect of a good reputation during a crisis for both agencies and actors. Consequently, this "credit line" will give a well-reputed leader protection and a better starting point to communicate and manage blame during a crisis (Bovens and 't Hart, 1996; Coombs, 2011; Boin et al., 2012).

The dynamic and 'relational' aspects of crisis accountability processes are also often discussed in recent crisis studies (see DeVries, 2004; Boin et al, 2010; Hood, 2014). Crisis actors need to relate to and convince other audiences, newsmakers, peers, and the opposition to pay attention to their particular crisis frame and support it. Incumbent officials and agencies explain their actions in relation to a crisis, while their opponents seek to expose their failures. Consequently, crises are accompanied by a dynamic interaction focused on "accountability management" (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). This perspective is also adopted in this

book. I argue that high pressure and the demand for crisis "accountability" will force top political actors to actively engage with their opponents in shaping the narrative on what went wrong and who should be held accountable.

The concept of accountability is a key aspect in the studies included in this book and there are several understandings of accountability presented in previous studies. Bovens et al. (2014) note that accountability is commonly defined in two broad categories: accountability as a virtue (a desired quality) or as a mechanism (by which actors can be held accountable). In this study, the focus is on accountability as a mechanism: a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor is required to provide answers and the forum can pass judgment. Here, crisis-induced activities are examined by looking at accountability forums, which place pressure on political and administrative office-holders to provide accounts of their knowledge, consideration, and actions prior to and in response to the crisis. These accountability relationships play a key role in the analysis of crisis events in chapters 4 to 6.

2.3 The blame management perspective

A key challenge for leaders in coping with crises is to attach meaning to negative events in a way that helps to alleviate pain and distress and has the ability to rebalance the order of things. There are several studies documenting how crisis-induced accountability processes lead to polarization rather than abatement and produce a "crisis after the crisis" in which issues of blame take central stage (Bovens and 't Hart, 1996; Bovens et al., 1999; Boin et al., 2005:100). There is an age-old tendency for a community struck by a disaster to look for "culprits" (see for instance Drabek and Quarantelli, 1967; Douglas, 1992). Bearing this in mind, policymakers should consider in advance blame-managing strategies they can apply if and when the need arises. Likewise, blame management is nothing more than a response mechanism that can be institutionalized and activated in different ways; for instance, through formalized structures and the delegation of responsibility, rules and procedures (Hood, 2011), inquiries, and investigations. In this book blame management is viewed as mainly a social, political and communicational activity. The success of these activities will depend on the individual performances of policymakers in crafting strategies and their relations with their opponents and critics in different arenas (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014).

There are several ways in which actors engage in post-crisis accountability processes and attempt to influence the way responsibility and blame are framed (McGraw, 1991; Sulitzeanu-Keenan and Hood, 2005, Hood, 2011). Hood (2011) identifies three strategies that officeholders can exploit in order to avoid or redirect responsibility. The first are *agency strategies* that limit formal responsibility through delegation. By having a delegation structure in place when crisis situations occur, much of the potential blame for wrongdoings can at least theoretically

be avoided or shared with others. The second is a *policy or operations strategy* in which policies are designed in such ways that a causal relationship between the choices of an officeholder and their possible outcomes becomes difficult to establish (c.f. Weaver 1986; Pierson, 1994). These two strategies both pertain to ex-ante mechanisms: ways to avoid blame if a situation would occur where responsibility for blameworthy actions needs to be assigned. The third category discerned by Hood refers to *presentational strategies* and is the most relevant to this research. It focuses on behavior and actions taken to avoid or stage management of outcomes in situations that have already been established as harmful and as violating important values (Hood, 2011).

Coombs (2007:155) identifies three categories of presentational strategies: various forms of denial or diminishing (nothing bad did in fact happen), rebuilding postures (taking responsibility and compensating), and bolstering (praising stakeholders and victimizing one's own organization). Few studies have addressed the actual process and interaction between actor strategies. According to these studies, strategies are employed following a staged retreat sequence and prone to particular outcomes which require a more in-depth case study design (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003; Jennings, working paper). Key actors can resort to these rhetorical strategies to deflect blame onto others. In defense, opponents will do the same. This struggle is at the heart of the dynamic that is often referred to as the 'blame game', where both sides will use rhetoric and symbolic actions to frame and put forward their interpretation of what the responsibility landscape should look like (Boin et al., 2005:103).

Although these studies are insightful, there remain unanswered questions about different contextual factors that can enable or constrain the use and effectiveness of particular blame management strategies.

2.4 The trade-off between blame management and learning

As the acute crisis abates, there is often a need for some form of public reckoning and "lesson-drawing" in order to achieve a stable post-crisis equilibrium (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). From a rational perspective, truth-finding dialogues and learning efforts would be expected in the post-crisis phase. But, the case is often that even more political high-stake games tend to arise among office-holders, the media, and others involved (Boin et al., 2005). For policy makers and members of accountability forums alike this creates a tension between the often stated need for the system as whole to learn and improve and their own particular and political interests. Over and beyond surviving and thriving in the 'game' of blame assignment (and sometimes credit-claiming, see Tilly, 2008), they know that this is going to be a part of the accountability and 'learning' processes that are set in motion following a crisis. These mixed-motives can lead to symbolical acts of learning and serve as 'quick fixes' in organizations or mandates, while preserving

the overall structure. Such examples of learning are the most commonly identified learning pattern in relation to crises. It is sometimes referred to as 'single loop learning' (Boin, 2009).

May (1992) distinguishes *policy learning* (social and instrumental) from that of *political learning* in which policy actors become more sophisticated in advancing their arguments and improving their framing strategies and political tactics. Prior experience (good or bad) can both increase as well as diminish the political skill and capital that certain policymakers have with the media, the public, and their opponents (Bovens et al., 2010). It is therefore likely that the effectiveness of particular blaming strategies will be influenced by the level of pre-crisis experience that an incumbent actor has acquired. Learning can also be addressed as part of the outcome of the post-crisis phase. Firing incumbent decision-makers might become the 'solution' to the problem and a response to calls for improvement and change. Removing a tainted decision-maker can very well be the action that is needed to rebalance equilibrium and to provide the opportunity for other measures and change (Boin et al., 2008). In chapter 6, the issue of post-crisis learning patterns in relation to blame management is addressed in a number of crisis events where incumbent governments in the Netherlands were challenged.

2.5 Coping with crisis-induced accountability pressures: The politics of executive survival

Crisis accountability, leadership and blame management studies all point to the importance of the individual key decision-makers involved in coping with crises. The outcomes of these high-pressure and dramatic incidents are greatly influenced by those incumbent office-holders that are in a position to influence the course of events. The same individuals can also be affected themselves by the consequences of the crisis, personally and also as representatives of various decision-making bodies. The stakes can be high. Political leaders of public organizations in particular are subject to a range of forces: mass media, parliamentary inquiries, (restraints of) the political system, legislation, their political opposition and the political climate. Together these influence their behavior and possibilities to act.

Scholars of public policy and politics have long been interested in the turnover of governments and tenure of political leaders (Mesquita, et al., 2005; Hansen et al., 2013). There are two main perspectives on the relationship between accountability and individual ministerial tenure today. There is a broader accountability relationship in parliamentary democracies that stems from the "chain of delegation" linking the electorate to the individual ministers through principal-agent relationships (Strøm, 2003): an electoral mandate is given to members of parliament to form a government and to scrutinize how the government executes its mandate. Accountability and sanctions of individual cabinet ministers follow this delegation relationship, and the government is ultimately evaluated through

elections. In a similar way Mesquita et al. (2005) explain that the turnover of political leaders is in the hands of the "winning coalition". In democracies, a particular party or candidate receiving the most votes does not necessarily constitute the winning coalition. The winning coalition consists of those groups which have agreed to build a government together. So in principle, three less popular parties can create a coalition and trump one very popular party. Consequently, the size and power of those groups forming the winning coalition in relation to the larger "selectorate" (all those who are able to vote) will essentially determine how long a political leader manages to stay in office).

There is a distinct constitutional aspect of accountability which is transferred through the delegation of power linking the support of the electorate to the tenure of a political leader. However, there is more to be understood about the turnover of political leaders. Mesquita et al. (2003) examine why leaders who seek prosperity and peace are less likely to survive in office than those who allow corruption and war. They conclude that bad policy can be good politics and good policy can be bad politics, depending on the circumstances. The circumstances of the institutional, situational and political context will also affect the likelihood that a political leader can stay in office. This study will also take a contextual perspective on political accountability processes.

Scholars interested in ministerial tenure seem to agree on a number of categories regarding the reasons why ministers resign. Woodhouse (2004) suggests that 'departmental fault' and 'ministerial accountability' (the duty of a minister to keep parliament informed) as cause for resignation can be summarized as failure to perform "role responsibility" (see also Dowding and Lewis, 2012). On the one hand, resignations can be the result natural causes (age, illness, etc.). One the other hand, ministers can be 'called' or forced to resign due to a breach of trust with the prime minister because of failed policies that fall under their department, due to personal scandals that damage their credibility, or due to a crisis that they or their subordinate agencies did not handle well (Dowding et al., 2012). Another important reason behind resignations can be due to "ministerial drift"; that is, a cabinet minister is drifting too far from the agreed party line or from the preferred policy line stated by the Prime Minister (Indridadson and Kam, 2008). Dowding et al. (2012) note an increase in forced resignations and partly attribute this to increased media scrutiny of ministers. In a crisis, ministers who are perceived as compromising or mismanaging their responsibilities can suffer undermined public and parliamentary support and they can be called to resign (Woodhouse, 2004; Bovens 2010; Bäck et al., 2012; Dowding and Lewis, 2012; Fischer, 2012). For instance, Prime Minister Aznar was voted out of office after the Madrid bombings in 2004 when he appeared to have misled the public about the causes of the attacks (in Boin et al., 2008). In 1995 the Dutch government resigned after several critical investigations, taking full responsibility for the failure to prevent the Srebrenica massacre in 1993 (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003).

The chances of being successful in employing various coping strategies are equally dependent on the choice of the blame management strategy as other individual, temporal and institutional factors. Top political leaders are enabled as well as constrained by both structural boundaries and their individual skills in positioning themselves with regard to accountability and learning; hence, both these perspectives play a crucial role in understanding ministerial resignations after crisis.

Prior studies have often combined comparative case study designs with statistical methods which give an indication of what factors should be of relevance to include in more in-depth studies of particular instances where ministers left office in connection with crisis events (see Bäck et al., 2012; Dowding and Lewis, 2012; Fischer, 2012). For instance, the *timing* of crisis (particularly when they occur during the electoral cycle) affects the likelihood of politicization and blame games (Boin et al., 2008). Most scholars agree that cases of resignation often correlate with intense scrutiny and negative media reporting (Woodhouse, 2004; Boin et al., 2005; Dowding and Lewis, 2012).

Certain arenas (such as the media, parliament and public venues) provide the ideal opportunity for blaming activities and therefore they are often staged here. But beyond these arenas, it is also crucial to look at the personal and professional backgrounds of the actors. Their age, gender, prior experiences, political capital as well as personalities and 'skills' can greatly influence how well particular individuals manage framing and blaming contests (see Boin et al., 2005; Berlinski 2007; Daléus, 2013). Studies in the Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany suggest that significant political experience, such as parliamentary and cabinet experience, seems to be a factor that protects ministers from having to leave office (see Bäck et al., 2009b; Fischer and Kaiser; 2009). In short, with experience comes a better understanding of the formal and informal rules and procedures of the political arenas and consequently certain leaders learn how they can exploit these arenas. The relation and relative "importance" of a minister to the prime minister is also a factor that scholars have found important in protecting ministers from forced resignations (see Dowding and MacLeay, 2011).

In the two last empirical chapters of this book I include some of the contextual and individual factors in the analysis of blame strategies. Based on the findings of prior research a few additional factors deemed to be important for ministerial tenure in Western parliamentary democracies are also included in the analysis. These are: prior parliament and cabinet experience, prior calls for resignation ("pre-crisis" credibility), one's position in the party, and the cabinet formation (single-party or coalition cabinet). By factoring in these individual and more structural characteristics into the conceptual framework I hope to benefit theory building for both ministerial tenure studies and crisis accountability studies.

2.6 Studying accountability in action

The field of studying crisis-induced accountability is a rather small field but there are several significant studies linking crisis situations to harsh accountability processes and "blame games" (Ellis, 1994; Bovens and 't Hart, 1996; Hood, 2002; Hood, 2011). These studies point to unexplored aspects and caveats that should be examined in order to better understand accountability "in action" (Hood, 2014; Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). What can actors really 'do' to influence crisis-induced accountability processes and when and how are they successful? Much effort has been put into studying blame management behavior; there is no doubt scholars find it important. At the same time, the efficacy of various types of strategies on possible blame attribution is difficult to substantiate empirically . One way forward is to examine the interface between theory and evidence through a more positivist perspective. For instance, this can be done by looking for historic evidence in larger n-studies between countries and sectors over time in order to help support or falsify predictions on which factors are important in linking blame management strategies to outcomes. However, constructions of models and simplified representations of political reality alone will not be enough to understand complex and dynamic accountability processes. More qualitative in-depth studies will provide a more detailed description of events and subsequently capture the dynamic and interchangeable relations and responses that are key in shaping accountability outcomes. This could be achieved through smaller n-case studies that focus on a few distinct (f-) actors. As an example, Jennings (working paper) in a recent study of four political crises found that strategies using personal statements to contain high blame levels in the media seemed to be effective.

The way top decision-makers choose to interact in managing blame is not random. Therefore, the different outcomes can be predicted and observable and thus conclusions can be drawn. There are clear gains and losses in the blame game: stakes are calculated, and positions are geared to support one's interests. If this was not true, top level actors would cease to invest in utilizing blame strategies. Yet in terms of research on the subject, there still remain significant issues and knowledge gaps relating to theory, analytical approach, and scientific findings that are worth discussing. This book, in particular the empirical chapters, is an effort to contribute to filling some of these knowledge gaps.

2.7 Knowledge gaps

This research effort was initiated by my interest in the ways blame management strategies are applied during crises. When I started taking a deeper look at this issue in mid-2000 there was not much scholarly work explicitly focused on understanding the staging and adaptation of such strategies in relation to crisis accountability events (see 't Hart and Bovens, 1999; Hood, 2002). Since then,

the number of theoretically oriented and empirical studies on various aspects of blame and accountability management strategies has expanded (Boin et al., 2005; Resodihardjo et al., 2012; Hood, 2014; Maor and Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2015). Despite these contributions there are several interesting aspects of these strategies that can and should be explored further, including the context in which they are played, the relationships between the involved actors, and their effect on outcomes. My efforts in attacking these gaps include linking meaningful theories, focusing on the interface between theory and empirical evidence, and applying a mix of descriptive and interpretive methods.

As previously seen, the political processing of crisis events involves a wide range of responses from the media, political opposition, parliament and other supervisory bodies. Incumbent policy makers and their defenders may respond to this by utilizing meaning-making tactics and even resorting to excuses, counter criticism, and scapegoating until they announce reform initiatives. But, there remains a need to examine more closely what political actors can and really want to do when they are confronted with a crisis. *What are the key factors that constrain or enable the use of particular strategies?* There is a wide range of strategies that in theory could be used but less is known about what is feasible under which circumstances. In addition to addressing this crucial question, a short summary of some of the gaps and unresolved issues and questions remaining in the scholarly debate and theoretical perspectives are presented here.

Most studies on crisis accountability and blame management have paid less attention to the *relationship and interaction between actors* that take place over time and the staged sequencing of actors' engagement and *the significance of arenas*. The creation and use of frames and strategies change over the course of time when actors engage and interact in displaying and fighting for their interpretation of the events. Framing blame is an activity that takes place on several arenas at the same time and with multiple actors involved. Early studies (e.g. Hood, 2002) did not factor in the effects of changing settings, actors, arenas and positions. When attempting to do so now, there are few studies that can be read and used to strengthen my efforts. The conceptual model presented at the end of this chapter attempts to capture different factors and dimensions that influence each other and lead to variations in outcomes but are not causally linked (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003).

In the end, there is a range of possible outcomes involved in post-crisis accountability processes in terms of sanctions and consequences for the stakeholders. A crisis might just provide the dramatic potential that opponents need to call attention to underlying problems of policies or actors that can delegitimize policies, individuals, and organizations. Incumbents have a stake in this process, as crisis accountability situations can open windows to reform policies, advance one's own position, and remove internal critics. There is no clear consensus in the literature on the *efficacy of these different tactics and strategies*. There are to my knowledge no studies, as of yet, that have substantiated any causal links between

the strategies employed and particular outcomes. This dissertation attempts to explore this particular relationship further and discuss which outcomes are at least more likely than others.

Both crisis and accountability studies are increasingly addressing communication aspects and *the role of the media*, an arena that does not just provide the back-drop for other actors but is in fact the prime arena on which incumbents, critics, status-quo players, and advocates-for-change have to play (Boin, 2009). This has long been a focus for media and communication scholars in studying public scandals and reputational crisis (Bromander, 2012; Nord and Ohlsson, 2013). But increasingly broader crisis and accountability studies have recognized the skill required to maintain trust and credibility when balancing the need for efficient crisis responses and displaying empathy in public arenas as a core competency for leaders (Coombs, 2011; Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014; Hearit, 2006). The construction of crisis narratives casting heroes, villains, and victims through real-time media outlets can have a real effect on policy change (Shanahan et.al, 2011). In the chapters of this book, the media is recognized as an influential arena that can work to amplify or undermine the framing attempts by incumbent leaders. However, in future studies of post-crisis accountability processes the media should be included as both an actor and an arena given their growing importance to blame management, as documented in other studies (Bromander, 2012; Nord and Ohlsson, 2013).

Previous crisis accountability studies have largely *neglected contextual factors* related to individual skills and competences as well as institutional boundaries and rules. Studies have favored situational and relational factors described through detailed crisis narratives and have commonly been examined through a decision occasion approach where crucial moments within a specific crisis process are analyzed as examples of sequences of "punctuated equilibrium" (Nohrstedt, 2007). On the other hand, accountability management has been studied through the use of specific institutional, social and political mechanisms. Recent studies have suggested paying more attention to the contextual factors that influence the accountability processes (Fischer, 2012; Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). For instance, specific administrative/political system features and routines, constitutional settings, and the characteristics and experience of individual decision-makers may constrain or enable a certain range of options in managing accountability. These factors are captured in the ministerial tenure literature. Therefore, I explicitly attempt to include them in the analysis and discuss them further in the latter part of this book, in particular the two last empirical chapters.

These distinct perspectives in studying crisis and accountability processes also have methodological implications. Post-crisis accountability research often applies *qualitative in-depth case studies* as the preferred research design (see Stern, 1999, Nohrstedt, 2007; Boin et al., 2010;). This reinforces the focus on situational factors, and critics would argue that such studies cannot clearly

substantiate causality or patterns (with less data points to compare over time). There are methodological challenges in studying the use and effects of strategies in accountability processes while at the same time comparing significant amounts of empirical observations. As a result, these challenges have limited the number of multivariate and comparative studies. One suggestion put forth is that future studies would benefit from focusing on a few core factors (e.g. post-crisis inquiries, displaying empathy, establishing responsibility, and learning,) and on their role in the possible re-equilibrium processes (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014). In the two last empirical chapters the conceptual framework is complemented by pulling together a few core factors from other fields of literature and by drawing upon a slightly larger number of crisis cases. The aim is to test if more sensitivity to context and individual specific features will enrich the original analysis of blame management strategies (as applied in chapters 4 and 5).

2.8 A conceptual framework

The synthetic framework that is presented here has been developed in two parts. The first part of the framework, the conceptual model applied in chapters 4 and 5, deals with presentational strategies and is represented in the form of a "blaming tree" (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). The dimensions capture clusters of questions pertaining to specific aspects that will be important for the analysis. Past research suggests that the presentational strategies ministers apply will depend on their perception of 1) how bad the situation is (severity), 2) what or who caused the problem; depicting events as operational incidents or as symptoms of endemic problems (agency and causality) and 3) who should be held responsible; that is, depicting events as caused by a single actor or by 'many hands' (responsibility) (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003).

The first dimension focuses on framing a problem as harmful or not. Once a problem is generally perceived as being harmful and violating or threatening crucial values (severity dimension), questions about causality are on the table (see the first dimension in figure 2.2 below). In the second dimension, the agency or actor will be in focus (see agency dimension in figure 2.2). Incumbents will be motivated to attribute adverse events to incidents as well as ad-hoc and lower level causal factors. This will push responsibility and blame down to the operators and first-line managers and away from the top-level policy makers. In turn, their opponents will argue that this problem did not occur as a one-time event. Any prior knowledge of risks or warnings will be exposed and policies, cutbacks and practices will most likely be questioned (Vaughan, 1999). This debate between competing frames was particularly salient in the aftermath of the tsunami crisis studied in chapter 4. If the latter interpretation of agency becomes the dominant one, then system-level policymakers will have a difficult time fending off responsibility and blame as evident in the case of prisoner abuse (see chapter 5).

At this point, the government and cabinet ministers might well be implicated, as was the case for the incumbent ministers involved in managing the tsunami crisis in Sweden (see chapter 4). In situations that are exclusively understood as situational crises caused by exogenous forces that could neither have been foreseen nor forestalled, blame levels on top political leaders are likely to be low. In other situations of institutional crises where the problem has been triggered from within a policy or institution, blame is likely to be more intense and flow higher up the hierarchy (Boin et al., 2010). The ministerial resignations that followed in Sweden after revealing the weapons affairs and the investigations in relation to the murder of Prime Minister Palme clearly follow this pattern (see chapter 7).

In regards to the last dimension of the figure (responsibility dimension), there are four different type of outcomes different types of outcomes in terms of attribution of responsibility and blame. These outcomes are proposed as the most likely, or feasible, ways to attribute accountability and blame based on the dominant perceptions of severity and agency. Outcome A generates scapegoating and crisis containment below the political level (i.e. firing a subordinate). Outcome B invites sanctions against operational organizations, and the adjustment of rules and procedures. Outcomes A and B can be observed in several of the crisis events studied in the Netherlands and Sweden. Blame was successfully redirected to the lower institutional actors, and the political actors could remain in office (see chapters 6 and 7). Outcome C is the politically most explosive one, at least from a blaming perspective. Here a crisis is defined as the product of errors or other shortcomings, over a longer period of time, by clearly identifiable senior policy makers. The whistle-blowing in relation to the arms deals affairs and the prisoner abuse scandals fit this pattern (see chapters 5 and 7), rendering intense political blame management activities. A significant pattern in the examined Dutch crisis events was the use of "collective" frames, promoting narratives of shared and dispersed responsibility to several actors and over time with little effect on outcomes (chapter 6). From a broader policy or institutional perspective, outcome D is the most salient one. It involves a narrative of a crisis as a result of fundamentally flawed systems or policy-making. When crisis narratives are cast in this manner some sort of major policy change or reform is inevitable, irrespective of the fate of the incumbent political elites.

Strategy choices are not static. They vary depending on the reaction and response of other stakeholders. The outcomes of such accountability processes should thus be seen as the result of many actors using different instruments and arenas when interacting over a longer period of time. The outcome will be the result of a contest of meaning-making and crisis accountability. Although in this "fog of war" there will most likely be patterns linking contexts, different types of crises, strategy choices, and communication with certain outcomes of blame attribution. This is represented below in the conceptual model called the "blaming tree" developed by Brändström and Kuipers (2003).

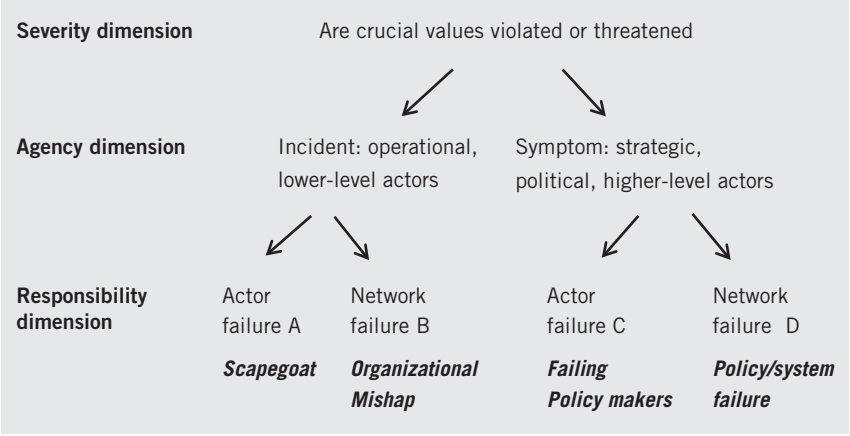

Figure 2.2: "The blaming tree"

The blaming tree provides an illustration of the dynamics of crisis-induced blaming processes. It provides a foundation for both systematic process description and interpretation of empirical cases. When it was applied to the empirical crisis cases, one of the conclusions that appeared was that it lacked sensitivity to contextual factors such as the particular political landscape and the division of power in parliament and cabinet (see for instance chapters 4 and 5). These are significant factors which are likely to influence the success or failure of particular blame strategies. Important information on the ability of individual decision-makers to actually perform certain strategies and gain support for their proposed narratives were not factored in either. The literature on cabinet and ministerial tenure offered more insights into such influential factors.

For example, findings from the UK suggest that there is a relationship between the age of a minister and the likelihood of resignation, where young and old ministers are most at risk (Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Berlinski et al., 2007). Studies from the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany suggest that politically related characteristics are more significant to ministerial survival, such as previous parliamentary and cabinet experience (Bäck et.al, 2009a; Fischer and Kaiser, 2009; Bovens et al., 2010: 331). Upholding a high position in the party and being "closer" to the Prime Minister or holding a more "important portfolio" leads to a greater amount of protection since the prime minister ultimately can remove a minister (Dowding and MacLeay, 2011: 125; Hansen et al., 2013). Prior setbacks are, according to some of these studies, a factor that increases the risk of resignation (Dowding and Dumont, 2009; Hansen et al., 2013). A key institutional variable pointed out is whether the cabinet is rooted in a coalition or single-party government. It appears that it is less likely that ministers will be fired during coalition governments (Dowding and Dumont, 2009:13; Bäck

et al. 2012; Hansen et al., 2013). This is quite straightforward; Prime Ministers are more limited within a coalition setting since changes might compromise relationships within the coalition.

These factors were brought into the conceptual model (see figure 7.1) and were tested in the two last empirical (see chapters 6 and 7). Due to the limitations of this book, some of the aspects from the original blaming tree were not addressed when analyzing these cases. The theoretical lenses of these two fields of literature are different, but there are also obvious differences in design and choice of research strategies in pulling these together. This is discussed further in the following chapter on research design and methods (see chapter 3).

Chapter 3: Research design and methods

3.1 Introduction to the research design

In this chapter I discuss the research design and methodological "span" within which the empirical chapters of this book are situated. The research designs of the different chapters range from low N towards medium N case studies. The methods and analytical tools used are within a span from rich process tracing to more positivist coding scheme exercises. These studies were performed over a period of 10 years and the avant-garde methodological scene has significantly moved forward since. Therefore it is worthwhile to discuss and reflect upon the study designs and methods used in the earlier studies of this book and the ones performed more recently. The study designs of the four empirical chapters can be broadly divided into two different types. They are different in focus, aim, and methodological approach and also reflect the developments concerning case study design in the current literature. I will start by briefly discussing the more contemporary knowledge and developments in case study designs (George, 1979; George and Bennett, 2005; Blatter and Haverland, 2012). I will then return to the case studies in this book and reflect upon how I approached them from a design point of view. In the concluding chapter I continue this discussion by returning to the methodological choices and limitations of the case studies.

3.2 From descriptive to explanatory case study research

Case study research originated within the qualitative and interpretive social sciences. It has been defined by Yin as an in-depth investigation of (contemporary) phenomena in a real-life context. A method that is particularly equipped to answer 'how' and 'why' questions (Yin, 2009: pp.8–18). Blatter and Haverland (2012) define case studies as a non-experimental research design that differs from large -N studies mainly through a smaller number of cases and larger number of

empirical observations within each. It also involves an intense and iterative reflection on the relation between empirical observations and theoretical inferences.

The groundbreaking work of Alexander George (1979) introduced the method of *structured, focused comparison* and instructed researchers to focus more on comparisons of 'within case' empirical observations. George and Bennett in their monograph *Case Studies and Theory Development* (2005) developed process-tracing as an 'operational procedure' to identifying and verifying causal mechanisms within cases that can influence the operation of other actors. Studies of small -N cases or single case studies with rich in-depth descriptions and a large number of empirical observations were suggested as a complement to the dominant comparative large -N case study templates. Since the late 1970's George (1979), Ragin (2008) and others (George and Bennett, 2005; Bennett, 2010) significantly have developed these case study designs. Studies have focused on critical junctures, sequencing, and path-dependency to explain outcomes. They are now also attractive for researchers seeking to offer causal theories, to generalize social mechanisms, and to formulate hypotheses (Bennett, 2010).

Structured focused comparison has been applied to historical processes in attempts to uncover who and what influenced their development (George, 1979) in both 'within case' (Lijphart, 1975) and 'cross case' comparative political studies (George and Bennet, 2005). Bennett's (2010) study of why the Soviet Union did not intervene in the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 exemplifies the use of process-tracing to explain what set of factors led to a certain outcome (non-intervention). Allison and Zelikow's (1999) story of the Cuban missile crisis, applying three different analytical methods, showed that explanatory approaches can reveal factors of influence that would not otherwise have been considered by the dominant paradigm of that period. In crisis studies, variations of process-tracing analysis have been applied to explain who knows what and when, and how their responses affected the outcomes (see Boin et.al., 2005; Nohrstedt, 2007).

The interest in small -N case studies has increased. Likewise, so has the debate about the theoretical value of these studies and the "fuzzy" application of analytical tools and coding principles. This is still a lively debate. The methodological reflections on case study research have expanded greatly, and the view on case study designs is also more diverse. Blatter and Haverland (2012) have thoroughly examined the growth of case study approaches and they suggest clarifying and being more specific about what kind of case study methods researchers are applying. Many case study designs are criticized for being often too all-encompassing and fuzzy and therefore running the risk of being weak in explanatory power and reliability. Recent studies offer more structured analytical tools ranging from comprehensively studying one or just a few cases and identifying theoretically informed patterns (Yin, 2009) towards more inductive approaches. (For a summary of this method, see Blatter and Haverland, 2012).

Ragin's (2008) Qualitative Case Analysis (QCA) approach strengthens qualitative small -N research designs by building a bridge between case and comparative methods. The QCA builds upon and highlights in-depth empirical knowledge and yet is capable of discerning cross-case patterns, the usual domain of quantitative analysis. By systematic matching and contrasting of small to medium -N cases the different causally relevant conditions and contexts can be identified. QCA is a recent methodological development within political science that draws causal inferences based on cross-case comparison, yet differs from process-tracing which is a 'within case' method that draws causal inferences. The advantage of QCA is that it enables generalizing a population of similar cases.

Blatter and Haverland (2012) have presented their own versions of case study approaches to increase their explanatory power and substantiate causal mechanisms. In their opinion, spatial continuity and temporal succession (as part of the context) are particularly important for understanding the behavior of actors. This counters the criticism of the "fuzzy" use of analytical tools and unclear contribution of in-depth case studies discussing causal inferences. They propose that Qualitative Case Analysis (QCA) is best complemented by three variations of case study design: Causal Process Tracing (CPT), Congruence Analysis (CON), and Co-variational analysis (COV).

Causal Process Tracing (CPT) is close to George and Bennett's notion of process-tracing (2005). CPT stipulates 'within case' or small -N case studies examining what makes certain outcomes possible. In particular, sequential and situational combinations of causal conditions and social mechanisms (causal configurations) are in focus. The strength of these 'within case' analyses is the potential of rich descriptions that identify causal chains and temporal explanations which are necessary and/or sufficient for certain outcomes.

The COV approach (Blatter and Blume, 2008; Blatter and Haverland, 2012) is similar to QCA. They are both examples of variable centered approaches to comparative case studies, instead of the outcome centered approaches of the process-tracing template. In both approaches multiple cases are examined in order to test if variation in the independent variable (or a particular configuration of causal conditions) leads to certain outcomes; for example, if the presence of bureaucratic infighting influences the response to seemingly similar foreign policy situations. In the COV approach, the researcher should look for cases that have co-variation in the dependent variable. Control variables should be monitored, and theoretically deduced hypotheses can be used for causal direction (Blatter and Haverland, 2012). Variables are not scored according to values but rather if the formulated expectation of that variable is confirmed or contradicted; that is, with a yes or no answer. As a result, the researcher can draw causal inferences if the dependent variable had an effect on the outcomes. The CON analysis is more theoretically oriented in testing and this explanatory approach provides new/more insight.

The empirical research reported in this study traverses two of these emerging methodological traditions. In chapter 4, the politicization and main political framing of accountability and blame were examined in relation to an external event: the 2004 tsunami response in three Nordic countries. In chapter 5, two comparable government responses to prisoner abuse allegations — internal events — were examined. George-inspired causal process-tracing methods were deployed when examining these responses since they were similar types of internal crisis events (Brändström et al., 2008; Brändström et al., 2011). In chapters 6 and 7, the outcomes of politicization of various events were examined: in particular, issues of crisis accountability and career management in coalition governments in the Netherlands (Brändström and Swinkels, 2015) and issues of crisis accountability and ministerial resignations in single-party governments in Sweden (Brändström, 2015). These were addressed using the QCA methodology, with a stronger focus on comparing a larger number of cases and less emphasis on 'within case' process analysis.

The first two empirical studies of this book represent the most dominant approaches at that time (about ten years ago) to case study analysis. The aim was to apply a novel theoretical approach to understanding blame management behavior (first reported in Brändström and Kuipers, 2003: an article not included in this dissertation) in historical cases. Specifically, I sought to identify the use of blame management strategies and sought to understand why and how they affected the course of events in the case(s) at hand. My co-author and I primarily performed small -N case study designs and used process-tracing as an analytical approach because it was a tried and tested method for revealing the complexity of a variety of causes and mechanisms of certain outcomes rather than the effects of particular causes (George and Bennett, 2005; Blatter and Haverland, 2012). We coded empirical data using the blaming tree as an analytical template, which was based on operational definitions of each of the strategies included in the blaming tree. Based on these studies we could see that blame was assigned in particular directions when a configuration of certain mechanisms and conditions were present. The limited number of cases allowed for a discussion of blame management patterns but offered limited possibilities for identifying causal mechanisms. By applying the same analytical template to several similar studies provided an intuitive sense of what combinations of causal conditions or social mechanisms contributed to the occurrence of specific outcomes (in our case, ministerial survival/resignation and crisis termination/escalation). From the early empirical studies I had learned that other variables had to be factored into the analysis if we were to gain greater explanatory leverage. Drawing upon a hitherto unrelated strand of research (on ministerial careers) allowed me to offer new and plausible explanations for the varied outcomes of ministerial blame management behavior. These were later added to the original blaming tree model. A study design was chosen that was able to account for more variables and yet at the same time allowed for a greater number of cases to be included in the analysis.

Hence the study design moved from a CPT to a more COV type of design. This entailed developing a more elaborate and rigorous coding book allowing me to structure the empirical material into data points. The main focus was to test a set of theoretically informed explanatory propositions.

All in all, in an incremental and, in part, a planned fashion, I have over the course of more than a decade been able to generate a systematic understanding of the use and impact of blame management strategies and of the configurations of (f) actors that enable or constrain the allocation of blame. At the same time, it is fair to say that the design choices I have made for the various case studies mean that I have not been able to substantiate the causal mechanisms of these processes. In chapter 8 I will revisit these choices and their limitations and will make some recommendations for the design of future studies of blame management.

Chapter 4: The politics of tsunami responses: Comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia[5]

Annika Brändström, Sanneke Kuipers and Pär Daléus

4.1 Introduction

On Boxing Day 2004, an earthquake in the Bay of Bengal triggered tsunamis that flooded the coasts of India, Indonesia, Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, killing hundreds of thousands and leaving millions homeless and destitute. The involvement of citizens from other continents gave this crisis a truly global dimension. Governments in Europe and Australia slowly but surely realized that this catastrophe far from home required a response other than expressing sympathy, collecting money and sending relief.

Thailand has long been a popular tourist resort for Scandinavians, especially during Christmas. Approximately 30,000 Swedes and thousands of Norwegians and Fins were on holiday in the disaster area in the last weeks of December. Soon after the waves hit the beaches it became clear that many Scandinavian tourists were missing, making this the worst peacetime disaster ever in all three countries. Even so, it took the three governments more than twenty-four hours to react to the crisis and several days to initiate rescue attempts, triggering media and political criticism at home. Interestingly, despite the similarities in context and government crisis responses, the tsunami disaster triggered markedly different political processes in the three most affected Scandinavian countries.

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5 This chapter was first published as: Brändström, Annika, Sanneke Kuipers, and Pär Daleus (2008) "The politics of tsunami responses: comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia" In *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning,* edited by Arjen Boin, Allan McConnell and Paul 't Hart. Cambridge University Press.

Some political leaders in Sweden, Finland and Norway found themselves a target of intensely critical media scrutiny and political criticism left, right and center, whereas others managed to escape this media onslaught. Why? This study focuses on different blaming processes– an inevitable and to some degree necessary part of societal responses to crisis (cf Douglas 1992). Blaming theory provides a basis for intelligent speculation about why the criticism on the three Scandinavian governments varied so widely. It probes into the accountability processes that evolve as part of the politics of crisis management. Accountability judgements depend to a large extent on how extreme events are framed politically: the dominant definition of the crisis includes an implicit reference to responsibility. Accountability and framing–the story of crisis management that is woven in the wake of the crisis events themselves – determine the fine line between heroes and villains, between fame and blame. As Boin et al. (2005: 92) argue: 'Crises have winners and losers. The political dynamics of the accountability process determines which crisis actors end up where'.

As the introductory chapter pointed out, accountability debates are hardly models of truth-finding dialogue. Here we substantiate the claim that these debates can rather be more like 'blame games', particularly when influential actors succeed in publicly framing the events and government actions in relation to these events as blameworthy violations of crucial public values. Blaming generates efforts by the accused to defend themselves, attack their opponents or to 'pass the buck' to others, setting in motion a spiral of reactions that can prolong or aggravate the crisis considerably.

News media play an important role in the blame game, in offering a public stage for framing strategies and by reporting and commenting on the events and actions. Media can frame actors as either heroes or villains during a crisis, as the supporting media coverage of President Bush after 9/11 and the critical media attack on the President after hurricane Katrina might very well illustrate (See Preston, 2008: chapter 2; Parker and Dekker, 2008: chapter 10).

Blaming theory assumes that the allocation of responsibility regarding crises and thus the fate of key politicians, officials and organizations involved, is determined by three factors: the institutional and political conditions under which blame games occur; the blame management strategies that actors choose to employ; and the skill with which they apply these strategies in the public arena. These factors can help to explain the puzzle of the tsunami blame games in Scandinavia: one crisis trigger, highly similar polities and administrations; highly similar government responses; yet markedly different political consequences.

In order to explain these differences, we begin by presenting a model of how blame games evolve. We then apply it to the political process during the tsunami crisis in Sweden, Norway and Finland. We further elaborate the model by inducing specific institutional and individual factors that help explain why the distribution of blame took different turns in the three countries. We conclude by formulating hypotheses that specify the conditions under which crisis-induced blame games take shape.

4.2 Playing hard ball: Blaming strategies in crisis management

When things are perceived to have gone wrong in government, policymakers sometimes willingly accept responsibility. However, *ceteris paribus*, most policymakers will try to avoid being linked to the problem, which is exactly what opposition spokespersons, media critics and others may try to do. Under criticism for alleged failures and wrongdoing, policymakers resort to rhetorical strategies to escape blame, including moves to deflect it to others. The latter are then prompted to do likewise. And so a 'blame game' develops: a verbal struggle between protagonists inside and outside of government about the allocation of responsibility for negative events that have occurred in society.[6] They struggle about the framing of the situation and the role that policymakers (should have) played in bringing critical incidents about or failing to prevent them. The literature suggests there are three core components of framing strategies in blame games:

1. *Constructing severity:* depicting events as violations of specific core public values;
2. *Constructing agency:* depicting events as operational incidents or as symptoms of endemic problems;
3. *Constructing responsibility:* depicting the events as caused by a single actor or by 'many hands'.[7]

These strategies are the same for defenders and attackers, because the essence of a blame game is that initial defenders to outside criticism engage in the game by becoming attackers themselves. We argue that a blame game is a staged process: it involves deliberate choices with regard to the way one frames a particular failure and its causality. The selective adoption of these framing strategies by political elites will lead to different outcomes of political blaming (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). Let us examine these strategies in turn.

Constructing Severity

The degree to which an event is framed as a violation of core public values (security, integrity, social justice etc.) determines the extent to which that event becomes subject of political and societal debate about blame. Different interpretations of the event put forward by different actors will struggle for domination. Personal,

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6 A 'frame' refers to a shared construction of reality (see Goffman 1974) and 'framing' activities can related to both the *use* and the *impact* of frames (see for instance Edelman, 1988; Schön and Rein, 1994; Kingdon, 1995; Iyengar, 1996; D'Angelo, 2002; DeVreese, 2003; Hurst, 2004; Eriksson, 2004). In this chapter a 'framing' move can be interpreted according to the definition of Boin et al. (2005: 88) as 'the production of facts, images and spectacles aimed at manipulating the perception and reaction to a crisis'.

7 The 'problem of many hands was first coined by Thompson (1980).

political and organizational gains and losses are at stake in this process (Edelman, 1964, 1977, 1988, 1995; 't Hart, 1993; Kingdon, 1995; Anheier, 1999; Boin et al. 2005). Media are explicitly biased towards negative events (good news is no news). An additional explanation of this focus on failure and the consequent efforts to avoid blame in this process is the negativity bias of the electorate. Voters are more likely to withdraw their electoral support when something negative occurs (cutbacks, scandals, austerity measures) than they are inclined to express support when political behavior is beneficial to them (Bloom and Price, 1975; Kernell, 1977; Lau, 1985). The negativity bias in electoral behavior instructs politicians to duck accountability whenever possible. Highlighting governmental failures is a powerful weapon in the hands of political opponents; one which government actors wish to deprive them of as much as possible—by denying or re-framing failure, or by passing the buck to others (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003).

Following McGraw (1991) we distinguish blame avoidance from blame management.[8] Blame avoidance refers to the construction of 'severity': it implies that public actors seek to frame incidents as inconsequential, not negative in their social implications, or as lacking political ramifications.[9] More political actors have a stake in the political debate if issues can be linked to substantive values that touch on sweeping social and political themes such as justice, democracy, liberty (Nelkin, 1975) or national security (Edelman, 1977; Bostdorff, 1994; Buzan et al., 1998). Framing an issue in terms that are salient to ongoing political themes is the key to capturing political and public attention (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994). Timing and substance are also important reasons why attention focuses on certain issues. As Kingdon (1995: 104) notes, momentum is essential: when an issue fails to catch on, 'participants quickly cease to invest in it'. When a story about a negative event does 'catch on' and is publicly perceived as falling within the realm of politics and government, attempts at blame avoidance have run their course and give way to blame management strategies, which accountable actors employ to avoid being pinpointed as culpable and/or responsible for the problems that have been identified (McGraw, 1991: 1135).

Constructing Agency

Once journalists or oppositional political entrepreneurs have 'discovered' a potential fiasco or scandal, they will put questions about responsibility and blame squarely on the table. Whilst government actors will be driven to depict the events as having been caused by incidental, ad hoc factors in an otherwise sound system, their critics will attempt to portray the event as an embedded incident, epitomizing a much larger systemic failure.

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8 See also Sulitzeanu-Kenan and Hood (2010).

9 That is, beyond the realm of political affairs such as 'the free market, the private sphere or matters for expert decision' (Buzan et al., 1998: 29).

Likewise, in temporal terms, incumbent elites trying to avoid blame will emphasize the immediate causes of a crisis – such as 'pilot error' or 'rule violations' to explain a plane crash. The search for causes then stops at the technical, operational, subordinate level. By contrast, their political opponents tend to place the incident in a broader time perspective in order to shift focus to powerful underlying causes – such as the nature of the relevant laws and regulations, government cutbacks or reforms, management decisions with consequences for safety practices, embedded organizational routines, and cultures tolerant of rule violation.[10] Going back in time often means going up the hierarchy, from street-level implementing actors to top-level strategic policy makers (Bovens and 't Hart, 1996). Top-level policymakers facing a crisis are therefore usually keen to narrowly define the scope of investigation and debate while their critics will want to broaden the time horizon and deepen the scope of post-mortems. The latter might receive support from operators and middle managers who feel their superiors are trying to frame them as scapegoats (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). These operators and middle managers will feed the debate by leaking implicating information about their superiors to media or opposition critics.

The core assertion here is that framing a failure in narrow technical terms decreases the likelihood of escalating blame games. Only if the problem becomes perceived in wider systemic terms and solutions to it become harder to agree upon, will blame games affect political fates.

Constructing Responsibility

Even if it there is a widespread presumption that the unwanted events were not just operational incidents, but were in fact linked to earlier decisions of top-level officials or embedded in organizational culture, the question remains who precisely should be punished. Incumbent policymakers are likely to argue that the incident is the result of what we might call a 'network' failure: a complex interplay of structures, actors, decisions, and actions. If this causal story sticks, responsibility for failures becomes a matter of the proverbial 'many hands.' If causality is 'dispersed,' then any blame will have to be too; and since blaming everyone for the something which they arguably contributed to only in small measure often seems unfair, sanctions are not administered to anyone – an agreeable outcome for the top brass (Thompson, 1980).

By contrast, pinning down the root of failure to individuals or parts of organizations will facilitate scapegoat solutions (Ellis, 1994; Jones, 2000). When incumbent politicians succeed in constricting the diagnosis of a critical event, they can relieve pressure on themselves by signaling that they are ready to take steps: firing subordinates and implementing additional measures to deal with the problem (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994). Having a scapegoat at hand is obviously convenient for policymakers. For that reason, some argue, providing

10 See an overview of such factors in Vaughan (1999).

for this blame absorption device has become an important consideration in the design of public institutions, particularly in the more politically risky areas of government policy (Hood, 2002).[11]

4.3 Synthesis: The Blaming Tree

A blame game can develop in different directions, depicted in figure 4.1 as a decision tree. For each dimension, two alternative options that influence the final outcome of the blaming process are presented. The evolving blame game can result in four different outcomes. Firstly, the event can be framed as either ad hoc or endemic, depending on the time perspective that becomes the dominant reference frame in the debates. Subsequently, both stand-alone incidents and systemic failures can be attributed to either complex networks or single actors. The resultant locus of blame of these alternate strategies is: (i) the scapegoat, an isolated single actor failure, (ii) the organizational mishap, an incident produced by 'many hands', (iii) the policy maker(s), responsible for shaping flawed policies and/or tolerating deficient implementation strategies and organizational malpractices, and (iv) the endemic system failure, a structural problem implicating many actors in a range of organizations.

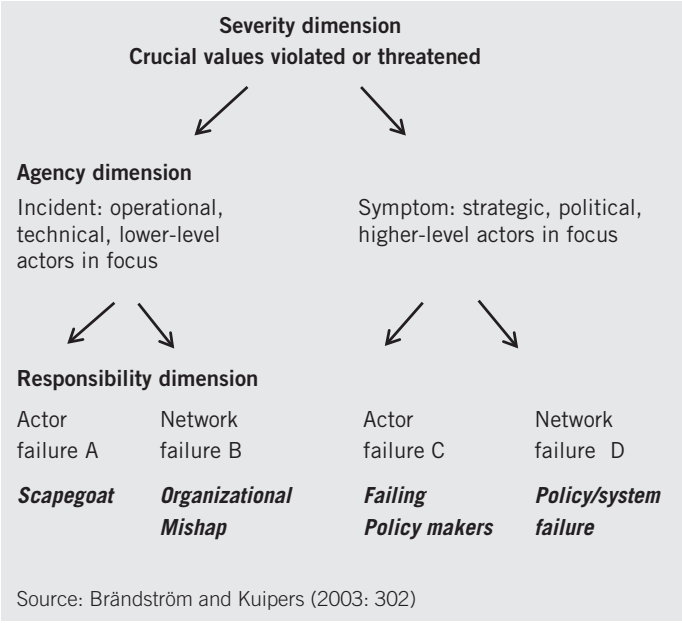

Figure 4.1: Constructing blame by framing political crises

11 Hood argues that ex ante blame avoidance strategies influence the selection of institutional arrangements for policy implementation e.g. the choice for delegation instead of direct control.

Now why and how do some accountability processes turn into blame games with either of these outcomes? Comparative research will reveal under which conditions actors employing certain framing strategies are likely to be successful in (re)directing the post-crisis media onslaught – to avoid being blamed or to focus blame on others. This is not as easy as it might seem. Boin et al. (2005) argue that blame strategies have a reflexive quality. A strategy can become self-defeating, for example when actors at the operational level who find themselves scapegoated by skillful blame-managing superiors, react by feeding media or government opponents with the necessary evidence to shift blame back to the upper echelons. Our analysis may have to follow different strategies by actors involved up and down the tree initially, but in the end we aim to assess the strategies employed and the resulting outcome for each case.

The framing tree serves as a model, to dissect the cases and understand how the blame games evolved. The comparative design of this study allows us to delve deeper into these cases in order to develop hypotheses in the end about the specific factors that influenced the blaming process and, consequently, its outcomes. Our assumption here is that both the scope of the crisis and the behavior of accountable actors in the end define the public perception of the crisis (as either a single actor deficiency, organizational mishap, failing governance or system failure). The behavior of accountable actors is in turn influenced by a mix of situational, individual and institutional factors.

4.4 An Asian disaster making waves in Scandinavia

This study compares Scandinavian public debates following the tsunami disaster: a crisis that could be characterized as an *incomprehensible crisis* according to the typology presented in the introduction of this book. We study the framing strategies employed at the strategic level by policy makers in Sweden, Norway and Finland when confronted with criticism of their performance as crisis managers. We also examine which factors – individual, institutional, cultural, situational – may account for the differential outcomes of these debates. The controlled variation produced by this 'natural experiment' allows us to analyze whether the obviously bigger human and material impact of the tsunami in Sweden provided more room for stakeholders to present alternative frames and has influenced the course and outcomes of the accountability process as compared to the other two countries (see chapter 1). It seems intuitively appealing to expect that the more severe the material and personal damage, the more likely it is for political blame games to occur and escalate (see also chapter 1).

Research on the politics of policy evaluation suggests that the relation between actual government performance and its public evaluation is low (Bovens and 't Hart, 1996; Bovens et al., 1999; Kofman-Bos et al., 2005). The government performance of the three countries is comparable but Swedish losses (number of victims) were much bigger. We hypothesize that not so much government

performance but the scope and depth of the crisis (in terms of losses) affected the nature of the accountability process and the gravity of the outcome. Simply put: the bigger the 'bang', the bigger the political fallout, regardless of actual government performance. The scope of the crisis would explain why the Swedish government was blamed more severely for its handling of the crisis than the two neighboring governments, even though their operational crisis responses did not differ all that much.

We have performed a content analysis of national newspaper articles to reveal if, when and how often political actors use blaming strategies, evaluate government behavior, (re)allocate responsibility, or attribute blame to specific culprits. We have coded all articles published on the tsunami disaster in two daily newspapers in each country published between 2 January 2005 and 22 January 2005.[12] Each article was coded according to a codebook.[13] We chose to start the survey one week after the tsunami since our reading of the press coverage revealed that in this case – unlike Bytzek's flood coverage in Germany reported elsewhere in this volume – the media coverage of the first seven days focused virtually exclusively on depicting the human drama and the course of disaster operations. It was not until the initial shock was over that media coverage shifted towards accountability issues.[14]

Table 4.1 summarizes the similarities and differences of the crisis response in the three Scandinavian countries. We use the dimensions of the blaming tree developed above to analyze how the accountability process evolved in the media, and which blame avoidance and blame management strategies were used by the chief protagonists.

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12 Complete reference lists with official sources, daily newspapers, news agencies, and articles coded in the three cases can be obtained upon request from any of the authors.

13 The codebook and codebook instructions based on Verheuvel (2002) with detailed information on the method applied can be provided as an appendix by the authors upon request.

14 The selection of newspapers was based on their status as national newspapers with a potentially large number of readers and thus potential influence on the key actors. The newspapers chosen (Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Aftenposten, VG Nett, Helsingin Sanomat and Hufvudstadsbladet) are all among the most widespread newspapers in each country. Swedish and Norwegian newspapers were read in original language. The international edition (in English) of the largest newspapers in Finland (Helsingin Sanomat) was chosen as well as the dominating newspaper in Swedish (Hufvudstadsbladet) in Finland. Finland is constitutionally bilingual and its main newspaper in Swedish is widely read. Newspapers and Internet editions were carefully scanned every day during three weeks. Articles were coded if the headlines contained references to key political actors, responsibility or accountability. A complete reference list of the articles coded can be provided upon request by the authors.

Table 4.1: Tsunami crisis – Similarities and differences in Scandinavian responses*

	Finland	Norway	Sweden
N people potentially affected	2,500 in southern Thailand[1)]	3,000 in Thailand or other parts of Asia[2)]	10,000 – 15,000[3)] in Thailand
N people initially missing	200–300[4)]	700–800	More than 2,000
First government reaction	The PM held his first press conference on 27 December.[5)]	PM arrived in Oslo after two days. PM and MFA had no contact until Monday. First press release from the FM on the 26 December.[6)] First press conference by the MFA, 27 December.[7)] First press conference by the PM on 30 December.[8)]	PM arrived in Stockholm next day. MFA arrived at the office 31.5 hrs after the floods. She was later criticized for going to a theatre Sunday night 26 December. First press conference with PM and MFA on Monday 27 December.[9)]
Operation of information channels	The hotline established at the FM after 9/11 jammed quickly on Sunday 26 December. Less than 10% of the people calling the FM got through.[10)]	Emergency team established at FM operating six different telephone numbers on Sunday.[11)] Emergency telephone number was activated two days later after. No one knew how to operate it. Only 50% of the incoming phone calls were answered.	FM encouraged relatives to call switchboard at the FM which jammed immediately. On 10 January, the PM appointed a new committee to be the contact point for victims and relatives.[12)] A call center was set up to take all phone calls from victims and families.
Responsible actors	An ad hoc emergency team was created. FM became responsible.	At the FM a crisis staff was established the 26th to get an overview of the catastrophe.[13)]	FM led the operative crisis management. PM led the press conferences. A coordination group was established in the Cabinet office.
Handling the lists of missing persons	Decision by the FM not to publish the list. National Criminal Police took over, lists were published and the number of missing reduced.[14)] Officials spoke of 250 Finns missing, the police updated the list to 260 missing on 30 December On 1 January the list dropped to 193.[15)]	New numbers every day. Police blamed FM for ill-handling registration, and ignoring police task and capacity in this regard. The Government blamed travel agencies for unregistered tourists.	After the first week, 2,000 Swedes were still reported missing. After the third week, National Police took over registration of missing persons (1,600). The names of the missing were published on 9 February and the numbers dropped by more than half.[16)]

* M = Foreign Ministry, MFA= Minister of Foreign Affairs, PM= Prime Minister.

	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Crisis management preparedness and training	Ministry of Interior had a well-prepared crisis management response system but in this case it was the responsibility of the FM.	A two-year-old crisis management coordination plan had not yet been implemented.	The Government cancelled regular crisis management exercises for civil servants when the incumbent PM came to office[17]. Recommendations of prior crisis inquiries and evaluations had not been implemented.
Authorization of evacuation and assistance by rescue services	The first airplane that arrived in Phuket carried insurance staff. Finnair was sent to Thailand to evacuate Finns on Monday 27 December. On 2 January the last Finns were evacuated. The Finnish Rescue Team was not authorized to go. Red Cross representatives argued their aid was sufficient.[18]	On the 29 December, Scandinavian airlines planes were made ready to repatriate citizens. A team of seven rescue workers went to Aceh province on new year's eve under UN flag.[19] A military plane with doctors and nurses took off on the 29 December.	On the 29 December, the first government ordered plane left to evacuate victims. Offers by the Swedish Rescue Service Agency to assist had been declined by government on 26 December.[20] First medical teams were authorized to go by the end of first week.
Visits to affected area	On 16 January, the PM's of the Scandinavian countries visited Thailand together to express their sympathy.	Idem. The MFA went to the area on 5 January.[21]	Idem. The MFA visited the affected area 27 December.[22] The King and Queen visited Phuket on 17 February.
Inquiries and commissions	High profile commission of ex-top politicians assigned by the government on 13 January to investigate government response, report was delivered June 2005.[23] Also, an internal investigation started on 10 January within FM, and was presented on 27 January.[24]	Parliament and government agreed 13 January on an expert committee to evaluate responsible agencies.[25] Report delivered April 2005.[26] An internal investigation of the FM was also initiated.	On 13 January a commission was assigned by the PM after parliamentary approval to investigate the government response. The Commission members were mainly high-level experts. Report was delivered December 2005.

1) Helsingin Sanomat, 30 December 2004 (Finnish daily newspaper)
2) Aftenposten, 27 December 2004 (Norwegian daily newspaper)
3) Dagens Nyheter, 13 January 2005
4) Helsingin Sanomat 29 December 2004
5) Aftonbladet, 2 January 2005 (Swedish daily newspaper)
6) Pressemedling (Press release), nr 174/04, 26 December 2004
7) Pressemedling (Press release), nr Unr./04m, 27 December 2004
8) Aftonbladet, 2 January 2005
9) Aftonbladet, 2 January 2005
10) Svenska Dagbladet, 8 January 2005 (Swedish daily newspaper)
11) Press release Norwegian FM, nr 173/04, 26 December 2004
12) Committee directive, 2005:1
13) Press release Norwegian FM nr 174/04, 26 December 2004
14) Svenska Dagbladet, 8 January 2005
15) Helsingin Sanoma, 30 December 2004 (and updated article on 30 December), 1 January 2005
16) Dagens Nyheter, 9 February 2005
17) Dagens Nyheter, 16 January 2005
18) YLE 24, 4 January 2005 (Finnish News Agency)
19) Direktoratet for Samfunnssikkerhet og Beredskap, 2 January 2005
20) TV4, Kalla Fakta, 14 February 2005
21) The Norwegian government's website for info on the disaster
22) Sydsvenskan, 29 January 2005 (Swedish daily newspaper)
23) Helsingin Sanomat, 12 January 2005
24) Internal review of the measures taken by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in connection with the tsunami disaster in South east Asia.
25) Aftenposten, 14 January 2005.
26) Commission website.

Constructing Severity

'Norway is the best country to live in. But not the best country to belong to when a disaster hits you on vacation.' Thus wrote a journalist on the Norwegian government's response to the tsunami disaster.[15] This comment reflected the sentiments in the media in Norway's neighboring countries in the weeks after Christmas 2004. The Swedish King concluded in an unprecedented and constitutionally controversial interview when asked if the government had done its job: 'I have a feeling that we have been very busy, but at the same time it is hard to see that we have done anything at all'.[16] In Finland criticism was hard on the failing emergency number at the ministry of foreign affairs: 'In Nokia-land where there are millions of telephones, the ministry of foreign affairs has only five!'[17]

The content analysis revealed that in Norway and somewhat later in Sweden both opposition leaders and experts participating in the debate (such as government agency directors, political scientists, writers etc.) were fast to claim that the disaster response left much to be desired, and that it had compounded the victims' plight instead of relieving it. In interviews with opposition leaders and experts, the Swedish and Norwegian governments were severely criticized for their inadequate handling of the crisis (see table 4.2). In response, government figures in both countries framed the tsunami disaster as an 'unimaginable' surprise that had simply been 'too big to handle'. For example, the foreign affairs ministers asserted in almost identical terms that: they were 'simply unprepared for the scope of the disaster', 'this was of a magnitude that could not have been predicted,' and 'the extent of the disaster surprised us'.[18] The media compared their governments' performance with the response of other European countries, which soon rendered these arguments unacceptable. The comparisons revealed that the national rescue teams could have been sent to the affected areas much quicker. By not doing so, it was argued, the Swedish and Norwegian governments had failed to help their citizens. For instance, Italy had confiscated all Italian flights bound for Thailand the first day after the disaster, to fly down and bring Italians home.

At first sight, Finland was the odd case out. It had quickly sent national airline Finnair to evacuate Finns. Like their Norwegian and Swedish counterparts, Finnish authorities were nevertheless criticized, mainly by journalists and disaster experts, for their slow and inadequate handling of information and for the indecisive government reaction. In fact, Finnish parliamentary investigators later credited the speedy evacuation by Finnair to prompt decisions by travel insurance companies rather than to government intervention.[19]

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15 Dagsavisen, 30 December 2004 (Norwegian daily newspaper).
16 Dagens Nyheter, 10 January 2005.
17 http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=148anda=360198
18 Aftenposten, 30 December 2004; Svenska Dagbladet, 27 December 2004; Helsingin Sanomat, 29 December.
19 Hufvudstadsbladet, 19 January 2005 (Finnish daily newspaper).

Table 4.2: Content analysis on the severity dimension

Pro govt.	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Deny	Frame	Neu	T	Deny	Frame	Neu	T	Deny	Frame	Neu	T	Deny	Frame	Neu	T
Norway	8	1	2	11	3	1	2	6	0	0	1	1	11	2	5	18
Sweden	2	3	1	6	4	2	0	6	3	1	1	5	9	6	2	17
Finland	--	--	--	--	6	0	4	10	1	0	0	1	7	0	4	11
Opponents	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Deny	Frame	Neu	T	Deny	Frame	Neu	T	Deny	Frame	Neu	T	Deny	Frame	Neu	T
Norway	0	7	0	7	0	3	0	3	--	--	--	--	0	10	0	10
Sweden	0	8	0	8	0	16	0	16	0	6	0	6	0	30	0	30
Finland	--	--	--	--	1	3	1	5	--	--	--	--	1	3	1	5

Note: This table indicates whether pro government actors on the one hand (*progovt) and opposition and critics on the other hand (*contragovt) deny that crucial values were violated (Den), frame the event as a violation of crucial values (Frame) or stay neutral (Neu). T means total, the hyphens indicate an absence of articles on the event in that week.

Brief Explanation: The government actors in Norway and Finland predominantly denied any blameworthiness in their accounts of the events. In Sweden government actors admitted in the first week that crucial values had been violated, but later on increasingly denied the blameworthiness of their actions. As for the opponents, the Swedish and the Norwegian oppositions exclusively and undoubtedly framed events as blameworthy. Finnish media analysis only yielded articles and quotes in the third week after the disaster, but in those quotes government actors were all in denial, whereas the opinions among opposition actors were divided on the topic of blameworthiness.

Initially, the governments did not consider themselves primarily responsible for their citizens abroad in the case of such a disaster overseas. The first response was to plan for humanitarian aid to the affected areas. Meanwhile, citizens witnessed increasingly alarming media reports on television of the devastating situation in the coastal areas, where many had gone missing and were desperately calling for help from national authorities. The Swedish and Finnish governments repeatedly denied that their failure to respond was blameworthy, whereas the Norwegians only denied this initially (see table 4.2). In all three countries, the Prime Ministers assigned the responsibility for handling the crisis to the foreign ministries. Even though the disaster was no one's fault, the media uniformly and increasingly portrayed the government response in Sweden and Norway as falling short of meeting the state's responsibility to protect its citizens. By Mid-January, the Swedish Foreign Minister felt forced to admit that the government should be better able to protect its citizens abroad.[20]

20 Dagens Nyheter, 16 January 2005; MFA speech at the Conference of Society and Defence, 16 January 2005.

Constructing Agency

In the three Scandinavian countries the initial criticism by media, public and experts focused on the technical problems, such as overloaded telephone lines at the ministries of foreign affairs, and on the slow dissemination of information to the respective Cabinets. In Sweden and Finland especially, special emergency phone numbers had jammed within hours and only a slight percentage of callers had gotten through. Likewise, it was reported in Norway that existing 'crisis hot lines' had proved dysfunctional and that improvisation to fix them had taken many hours.

Once it was established that pivotal parts of the operational response in all three countries appeared to have failed, the public spotlight turned to the top decision-makers. The Swedish Prime Minister argued that his slow response was due to a lack of information. He complained that incoming fax messages had not been sent up the hierarchy: 'The information we got was not forwarded to the decision-makers. The problem is not the organization as such but the fact that someone has not performed his or her duties' (SR, Ekot 12 January 2005). The other two Nordic governments attributed their belated response to similar technical problems. Both the Swedish and the Norwegian ministries of foreign affairs also blamed the travel agencies who had said they would manage to evacuate the victims themselves and did not need governmental aid.[21] As table 4.3 shows, Norwegian and Swedish policy makers tried to frame the failures as operational mishaps whereas their critics highlighted the political responsibility for the mishaps that occurred.

The management of victims' lists became a delicate issue in all three countries.[22] The prospect of potentially minimizing the number of missing by publishing their names was sacrificed to protect the privacy of the victims and their families. When the three governments chose different approaches to this dilemma, critics compared their actions to one another, which elicited critical scrutiny by the media. Swedish and Norwegian police officials blamed their foreign ministries for their failure to release the names promptly like other countries, as for example Finland and Denmark had done.[23] The rescue services in all three countries were similarly critical of the slow organization of evacuation flights and their governments' failure to utilize assistance offered by public agencies.[24]

In each country, the foreign ministers played down any organizational shortcomings but did admit that their response had been too slow. They promised

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21 Nettavisen, 31 December 2004 (Norwegian daily newspaper).

22 Similar problems occurred during other crises, see for instance the account by Kofman-Bos et al. (2005) of the Bijlmer Air Crash and the Estonia Ferry disasters.

23 Aftenposten, 3 January 2005; Dagbladet, 3 January 2005 (Norwegian daily newspaper); Swedish SvD, 8 January 2005.

24 Aftonbladet, 13 January 2005; Aftenposten, 30 December 2004; YLE24, 4 January 2005.

internal evaluations of their ministries' crisis management capacities.[25] Framing the problem as mainly a lack of resources, they sought to absorb responsibility in a politically 'safe' way, and at the same time move the debate towards possible solutions to the problem e.g. additional resources and organizational improvements.

This appeared to work in Finland and Norway, where critics framed the causes of the problems mainly in technical-organizational terms, but not in Sweden where they persistently emphasized the strategic and political factors at work (see table 4.3). Correspondingly, Finnish and Norwegian government actors continued to concentrate public discussion on issues such as the lack of information, technical malfunctions, and slow reactions by civil servants and agencies, whereas their Swedish counterparts could not.

Table 4.3: Content analysis on the agency dimension

Pro govt	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Techn	Polit	Neu	T	Techn	Polit	Neu	T	Techn	Polit	Neu	T	Techn	Polit	Neu	T
Norway	7	0	4	11	6	0	0	6	1	0	0	1	14	0	4	18
Sweden	4	1	1	6	6	0	0	6	4	0	1	5	14	1	2	17
Finland	--	--	--	--	8	0	2	10	1	0	0	1	9	0	2	11
Opponents	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Techn	Polit	Neu	T	Techn	Polit	Neu	T	Techn	Polit	Neu	T	Techn	Polit	Neu	T
Norway	0	7	0	7	0	0	3	3	--	--	--	--	0	7	3	10
Sweden	0	8	0	8	1	14	1	16	0	6	0	6	1	28	1	30
Finland	--	--	--	--	1	0	4	5	--	--	--	--	1	0	4	5

Note: This table indicates whether pro government actors on the one hand (pro govt) and opposition and critics on the other hand (opponents) frame the event as operational, technical (Techn.), frame the event as strategic, political (Pol.) or stay neutral (Neu). T means total, the hyphens indicate an absence of articles on the event in that week.

Brief Explanation: Government actors in all three countries almost exclusively framed the events as technical, operational, indicating that blame should rest on the shoulders of lower level officials, instead of on themselves. The Swedish opposition fiercely contested this interpretation of events by their government, whereas their Norwegian counterparts commented in a more neutral manner in the third week and the Fins practically agreed with their government.

In Sweden the blame game escalated when the political leadership was unable to field the criticism. Swedish Prime Minister Persson declared early after the occurrence of the tsunami that all other matters should rest, and that it was time for national solidarity. The parliamentary opposition honored this call, but only temporarily. In a number of interviews, Persson unsuccessfully continued to focus

25 More telephone lines, on-call teams, better information systems and computer support. Finnish Prime Minister's Office, Press Release, 10 January 2005.

on failures by lower-level officials, arguing that he had trusted the ministry to do their job: 'I contacted my state secretary, and asked him to inform me about the situation. He contacted the Foreign Ministry, which replied that the situation was being monitored and was under control'.[26]

The media and opposition criticized the Swedish PM's attempt to blame individuals at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as unjust and as another attempt to pass the buck. It left him open to even more intense scrutiny of his own and his government's actions dating back a long time before the tsunami. Table 4.4 documents the attempts to influence the temporal scope of accountability discussions.

Table 4.4: Content analysis on attempts by actors to influence the temporal scope of accountability discussions

Progovt	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Nar	Exp	Neu	Tot	Nar	Exp	Neu	Tot	Nar	Exp	Neu	Tot	Nar	Exp	Neu	Tot
Norway	3	0	8	11	1	1	4	6	0	0	1	1	4	1	13	18
Sweden	3	1	2	6	4	0	2	6	3	0	2	5	10	1	6	17
Finland	--	--	--	--	6	0	4	10	0	0	1	1	4	6	5	11
Contragovt	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Nar	Exp	Neu	Tot	Nar	Exp	Neu	Tot	Nar	Exp	Neu	Tot	Nar	Exp	Neu	Tot
Norway	0	3	4	7	0	2	1	3	--	--	--	--	0	5	5	10
Sweden	0	6	2	8	0	11	5	16	0	4	2	6	0	21	10	30
Finland	--	--	--	--		0	5	5	--	--	--	--	0	0	5	5

Note: This table refers to articles where government actors (*progovt) and opposition and critical experts (*contragovt) narrow the time frame (Nar) or expand the time frame (Exp).

In response to Persson's accusations, civil servants leaked compromising information about a long-term neglect of crisis management preparedness and systemic disregard of evaluations of earlier crises. Table 4.4 shows that in week three, opposition speakers and independent experts seize their chance to widen the time frame. This new perspective fueled the Swedish debate and the tsunami response became symptomatic of an endemic vulnerability: an institutional lack of preparedness and thus an organizational incapacity to handle crises.[27]

26 Swedish Television (SVT), interview with the PM, 12 January 2005.

27 A Swedish media study recognised that the national media coverage soon got a political element and stated that the criticism of the social democratic government was unprecedented. 50% of the media (TV, radio and news papers) reports commenting the Prime Minister was negative and for the Foreign Minister the number was 75 % (DN, 11 March 2005, 'Kritiken lyfte Göran Persson', Media study by Observer).

By contrast, Norwegian political actors admitted their part in the slow response together with the lower levels in the government hierarchy. Although it became clear that the Norwegian government had failed to implement a two-year-old plan to enhance crisis management capacity, this did not arouse much criticism. In Norway, even opposition leaders and critical experts labelled the tsunami an incident.

Table 4.5: Content analysis on framing the event as incidental, non-recurring or symptomatic/ structural

Pro govt	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Inc	Sym	Neu	Tot	Inc	Sym	Neu	Tot	Inc	Sym	Neu	Tot	Inc	Sym	Neu	Tot
Norway	3	0	8	11	0	0	6	6	0	0	1	1	3	0	15	18
Sweden	4	1	1	6	4	0	2	6	2	0	3	5	10	1	6	17
Finland	--	--	--	--	0	0	10	10	0	0	1	1	0	0	11	11
Contra govt	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Inc	Sym	Neu	Tot	Inc	Sym	Neu	Tot	Inc	Sym	Neu	Tot	Inc	Sym	Neu	Tot
Norway	0	5	2	7	0	3	0	3	--	--	--	--	0	8	2	10
Sweden	0	8	0	8	0	11	5	16	0	5	1	6	0	24	6	30
Finland	--	--	--	--	0	0	5	5	--	--	--	--	0	0	5	5

Note: This table refers to Articles where Government Actors (*Progovt) and Opposition and Critical Experts (*Contragovt) Frame the Event as Incidental, Non-Recurring (Inc) or Frame the Event as Symptomatic, Structural (Sym).

In sum, government leaders in each country attempted to focus debates about the causes of crisis management shortcomings on technical, situational malfunctions and lower level organizational mishaps. Their success varied, partly because of the aforementioned reflexive nature of blame games: at a certain point the blamed (in this case at the operational level) may react by broadening the time frame to include the responsibility of others (their superiors). This happened in Sweden, where ministers were least successful in making blame stick to lower levels only (see table 4.5).

Constructing Responsibility

Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen stated in his New Year message that 'Under conditions such as these, government action alone is never enough'.[28] Political leaders of all three Scandinavian countries conveyed the same message: this was not just their responsibility. A broad range of actors, both private and public, had been unprepared for the scope of the crisis and the coordination and

28 Prime Minister's Office, 30 December 2004.

actions required. According to the third dimension of the blaming tree, policy makers can choose to either attribute responsibility to one specific actor, or disperse responsibility across a complex network of actors, with varying consequences for the intensity of criticism this provokes. Government actors handled criticism differently in the three countries (see table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Content analysis on the responsibility dimension

Progovt	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Dis	Con	Neu	Tot	Dis	Con	Neu	Tot	Dis	Con	Neu	Tot	Dis	Con	Neu	Tot
Norway	7	1	3	11	5	1	0	6	1	0	0	1	13	3	2	18
Sweden	5	1	0	6	2	4	0	6	3	0	2	5	10	5	2	17
Finland	--	--	--	--	9	0	1	10	1	0	0	1	10	0	1	11
Contragovt	Week 2				Week 3				Week 4				Total			
	Dis	Con	Neu	Tot	Dis	Con	Neu	Tot	Dis	Con	Neu	Tot	Dis	Con	Neu	Tot
Norway	0	7	0	7	1	0	2	3	--	--	--	--	1	7	2	10
Sweden	1	7	0	8	6	7	3	16	1	5	0	6	8	19	3	30
Finland	--	--	--	--	0	3	2	5	--	--	--	--	0	3	2	5

Note: This table refers to the number of articles where government actors (*progovt) and opposition and critical experts (*contragovt) disperse (Dis) or concentrate responsibility (Con) for perceived crisis response failures.

In Finland, the government chose to quickly admit shortcomings such as lack of preparedness and inadequate resources. It also signaled its awareness of the importance of the events through Prime Minister Vanhanen's early decision to assign a high-level investigation committee. Finnish opposition parties refrained from criticizing the government, for which Prime Minister Vanhanen expressed his gratitude in a hearing on 2 February 2005.[29] His predecessor, Ahtisaari, the chair of the Finnish Investigation Committee, stated in a press conference on 11 January 2005 that the aim of his committee was not to assign blame, but to evaluate in order to improve future operations.[30] In a parliamentary hearing the Prime Minister claimed that the organization at large had functioned well.[31] As a consequence, no specific actor was blamed.[32] Ahtisaari effectively dispersed blame across 'many hands': various government agencies for lack of information, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for insufficient emergency hotlines and staff capacity, the EU for lack of cooperation between EU countries, and media for not correctly reporting the crisis.[33]

29 Hufvudstadsbladet, 4 February 2005.
30 Helsingin Sanomat, 12 January 2005.
31 Hufvudstadsbladet, 4 February 2005.
32 YLE24, 12 January 2005.
33 Dagens Nyheter, 13 January 2005.

The Norwegian government also chose to accept blame when initial attempts at blame avoidance backfired. The Minister of Foreign Affairs initially defended his ministry stating that 'everything worked automatically'.[34] Top civil servants at the foreign ministry pointed out that the travel agencies had overestimated their own capacity to evacuate victims during the first week.[35] In response, the director of the travel industry federation did admit that their emergency plan had failed.[36] Still, criticism of the government did not abate. Then, during a web chat, the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs went a step further. He stated that 'the responsibility [for the belated response] is mine'.[37] Likewise, the Norwegian Prime Minister eventually admitted that the government reaction had been too slow and that more aid should have been sent to the disaster area immediately.[38] The opposition welcomed the government's acknowledgements of its responsibility, and – like in Finland – the debate ended there and then.[39]

In Sweden, the government did not manage to placate the increasingly vociferous criticism. Its leaders initially denied that it had reacted too tardily; when this became untenable, they emphasized that the slow response was not due to any blameworthy behavior on its part. They pointed at mistakes made by lower level civil servants in processing the incoming information. These attempts at blame deflection opened a political Pandora's box. The opposition seized the opportunity: 'I think it is a sign of weak leadership if political leaders don't take responsibility in this situation', one opposition leader said, deriding the Prime Minister's attempts to scapegoat civil servants.[40] In a joint article in a daily newspaper, the Swedish opposition parties blamed Prime Minister Persson for being weak and blinded by his long hold on power. The Norwegian social-democratic party leader came to his neighbor's aid and criticized the Swedish opposition for playing 'party politics' and politically abusing a tragedy.[41] Meanwhile, stories about the Prime Minister's lack of concern for government crisis management capacities started to leak from ministry sources. This information exposed the extent of the government's failures and shifted attention to the Prime Minister. Political opponents joined forces in accusing Persson of having cancelled crisis management exercises and holding him personally accountable for not implementing recommendations of previous crisis management audits.[42]

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34 VG NETT, 7 January 2005 (Norwegian daily newspaper).
35 Nettavisen, 31 December 2004.
36 Dagbladet, 1 January 2005.
37 Dagbladet, 3 January 2005.
38 Dagens Nyheter, 8 January 2005.
39 VG NETT, 10 January 2005.
40 Expressen, 12 January 2005 (Swedish daily newspaper).
41 Dagens Nyheter, 24 January 2005.
42 Dagens Nyheter, 16 January 2005.

In response to opposition critique, the Social Democratic party secretary charged the Swedish King – who had made a speech on the tsunami crisis which contained thinly veiled criticism of the government's response – of overstepping his constitutional mandate as non-political head of state.[43] Commentators duly retorted that the Prime Minister had sent in his party secretary as a 'kamikaze pilot' to attack the King whose emotional speech during a memorial ceremony for the victims had struck a chord with the entire nation.[44] When Prime Minister Persson criticized the Thai government for failing to react to a warning it had received two hours before the tsunami, the opposition called this yet another ill-chosen attempt to pass the buck: 'Göran Persson seems to be very eager to disperse blame and avoid responsibility'.[45] The more the Prime Minister defended his government by explaining the late response in terms of other people's failures, the more scathing his opponents and the media became of his own performance.

After considerable debate, on 13 January 2005, the PM had to accede to an independent investigation led by the chief justice of appeal.[46] The commission delivered its report in late 2005, blasting the government as a whole and the Foreign Minister in particular for what it depicted as institutionalized negligence and a failure to learn from prior experiences and investigations. Given the reality of his personal dominance over his party, and his party's dominance within parliament, the report had no immediate political consequences, but it remained an awkward sting in the government's side in the run-up to the September 2006 elections. In spring 2006, after weeks of hearings of the top political elite in the committee of the constitution, the Minister of Foreign Affairs resigned. Formally her resignation was not linked to the tsunami crisis but the media and public saw her stepping down as a direct result of the massive critique and the damaged reputation of the government and the Minister herself.[47]

In May 2006 the Prime Minister's State Secretary and right-hand, Lars Danielsson, took a 'time-out' as media started probing into his actions during the tsunami. Danielsson had been under severe media attention since the tsunami commission's report because he could not give a clear account of what he did, whom he called and what he had said to the Prime Minister to alert him on the 26th of December 2004. His presence in the Cabinet became untenable after several critical media reports, implying that he had lied to the tsunami commission and to the standing committee on the constitution.[48]

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43 Swedish Radio, Ekot, 14 January 2005.

44 Dagens Nyheter, 14 January 2005; Dagens Nyheter, 15 January 2000; Svenska Dagbladet, 11 January 2005.

45 Debate in Parliament, 19 January 2005 and Swedish Television, (SVT) 17 January 2005.

46 http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/03/68/53/b7d6be2c.pdf

47 Svenska Dagbladet, 21 March, 2006.

48 Svenska Dagbladet, 19 May, 2006.

In August 2006 the Justice Ombudsman criticized the government for the handling of the tsunami crisis and especially the actions of Danielsson.[49] The Social Democratic government lost the elections in September 2006 to the center-right coalition of opposition parties. But post-crisis investigations continued by intensified media scrutiny. Media accounts revealed that phone-records as well as tapes containing information on the e-mail communication in the Government Offices in the days following the tsunami had been erased. Critics claimed the previous Cabinet had orchestrated an elaborate cover-up. Within a few days, the new Prime Minister announced in a press conference that the tapes containing e-mail traffic had been found.[50] On February 8th the Commission of 2005 was reinstated to analyze the new information and its implications for the actors involved in the tsunami. The Commission will present its conclusions on April 25, 2007. The head of the commission has stated that he wants to present the "truth" about the actions of the top civil servants close to the Prime Minister and their involvement in a potential cover-up.[51]

4.5 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to employ a framing and accountability model to conduct a comparative analysis of three Scandinavian cases. We were especially interested in what factors influenced the different outcomes of the blaming process. Why did the three cases yield such diverging outcomes in terms of blame assignment, and under what conditions are these different outcomes likely to emerge? Given the methodological constraints of this study – only two newspapers were studied per country; no electronic media – this comparative case study offers a rather coarse cut of crisis-induced accountability processes in the three countries. Its empirical findings can only provide provisional hypotheses of the corollaries of crisis-induced blame games that remain to be tested in a more rigorous fashion.

The comparative analysis shows that in all three cases, media, public and experts needed little convincing that a terrible thing had happened and that their victimized countrymen had a right to expect more and quicker support than they actually received. The first attempts by government officials to avoid blame by framing the flood disaster as an 'act of god' failed. As the governments were increasingly seen as responsible and dissatisfaction was growing, accusations were made against them. In terms of constructing severity of government failure, we

49 Svenska Dagbladet, 28 August, 2006.

50 DN, September 2006 (www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polypoly.jsp?d=1042anda=578247), Svenska Dagbladet October 12.

51 Svenska Dagbladet, 31 January, February 7 and 15, 2007, Committédirective 2007:15, Ministry of Finance (http:www.regeringen.se/sb/d/8735/a/76597).

can conclude that all three countries initially denied that their flawed response had aggravated the crisis. Later, the public apologies by the Finish and Norwegian governments seemed to have had a cushioning effect on the blaming process and the political elite could escape further damage. The Swedish government's reaction stands in sharp contrast to this apologetic approach.

In Finland and Norway, the prime ministers had been delegating crisis management duties to their agencies to a much greater extent than the Swedish prime minister had done. Consequently, in the Finnish and Norwegian case many hands were implicated and responsibility was shared between multiple actors, mainly the ministries of foreign affairs and government agencies. The representation of what caused the slow response concurs with outcome B, *organizational mishap*. Moreover in Norway, the travel industry was implicated alongside public authorities. It accepted its culpability, as opposed to the Finnish and Swedish travel industry which could demonstrate that they had been pushing for the government to take action, to no avail.

The framing strategies to assign agency played out differently in the three cases, partly because Finland and Norway had crisis management delegation structures in place. Consequently, media and public criticism focused on operational, technical failure at the level of government agencies (cf. Hood 2002). In Sweden there was no explicit delegation for crisis management capacities in place and agency responsibilities were unclear. Persson had informally centralized crisis management authority during previous extreme events in Sweden, therefore criticism and blame shifted automatically up the hierarchy.

In Sweden the government continued to deny responsibility. The political opposition accused it of a long-standing neglect of crisis management capacity-building at the very core of the state apparatus. The mandates and responsibilities of the government agencies in coping with crises were still under consideration and remained unresolved. The fact that the Swedish Prime Minister had assumed a more direct, informal symbolic role as the 'father of the nation' during other crises that had taken place in the recent past rapidly turned the tsunami response into a matter of high politics: where was he now? This finding supports the notion that the *historic record* of leaders matters for the blame game. The government's attempts to widen the frame of responsibility, and cast blame towards unlikely culprits such as the Swedish King and the Thai government were, if anything, counterproductive. The reflexive quality of this framing strategy is illustrated by these attempts. When Persson made implausible and unsubstantiated allegations against others, a boomerang effect kicked in, aggravating critique on the Prime Minister himself.

The Swedish blame game kept fueling itself: the more the government denied having acted inappropriately, the more fault-finding took place at the hands of the governments' political opponents and the mass media. In response, the Swedish Prime Minister finally proposed a number of improvements to crisis management capacities, although initially none of these pertained directly to his own Cabinet office (Debate in Parliament, 19 January 2005, Rixlex).

One explanation for the severity of the critique of the political elite in Sweden was the lack of a synchronized political response to the media and public that encompassed both recommended improvements (a solution) and acceptance of responsibility on a high-level. The unresolved institutional issue of who should be responsible for coping with a national crisis, provided a rich background for critical media. Whereas the public blame focused on failing policy makers (outcome C), these policy makers' response aimed at repairing organizational mishaps (outcome B). This clash in these two interpretations intensified rather than tempered the criticism. Similar to the findings in the Madrid bombing case (see Olmeda, 2008) the credibility of the government and the Prime Minister in particular was undermined by their continued rejection that they got it wrong. The Swedish Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs became the personification of the failure, and bore the brunt of the inadequacies of the entire Swedish crisis management system.

In December 2005, the Swedish Commission investigating the response concluded that: 'Prime Minister Göran Persson has the overall responsibility for the shortcomings in the Government Offices' response to the consequences of the tsunami', and that the lack of crisis management capacities in the government offices during Persson's incumbency was due to a conscious choice on his part.[52] Sweden was hit worse in terms of affected victims than Finland or Norway and the drive to assign responsibility and blame seems to have been stronger in Sweden. This finding confirms our initial claim that the size of the crisis matters in accountability processes. Also, uncertainty increased the impact of the event. The fact that Sweden did not substantially bring down the number of missing persons in the first month, made every political move delicate and fixed the eyes of the entire nation on the way government was handling the crisis. Because no one knew precisely who was missing, many more people were potentially involved as relatives and acquaintances and the crisis thus had a direct impact on a larger part of the population. The Swedish government had a bigger crisis to deal with, but the perceived failures in managing the crisis aggravated the public perception and political criticism to a greater extent than in their neighboring countries.

4.6 The road ahead

From this analysis, we infer three hypotheses that explain why different patterns of blaming emerged in the cases, and might do so in others as well. The first conditional factor stems from an important difference between the cases. The formal or informal concentration of power negatively influenced the possibilities

52 Swedish Government Report SOU 2005:104 (2005) *Sverige och tsunamin – granskning och förslag*. Fritzes Offentliga Publikationer.

for incumbent elites to deflect blame in the Swedish case. During his incumbency, Swedish Prime Minister Persson had deliberately centralized informal power within his Cabinet and had been accused of assigning weak ministers under a tight rein.[53] There was no agency at 'arms-length', which would allow for a blame shift to a delegated agency When the crisis hit Sweden, all attention automatically turned to the Prime Minister, much more so than in the Finnish and Norwegian cases. In future comparisons, we would therefore like to test the following hypothesis: *The higher the degree of formal and perceived centralization of executive power, the more likely the blame will go up the governmental hierarchy.*

The second factor we detected is the importance of decisive action to launch a heavy weight inquiry. In fact, our hypothesis for future research would be that *the sooner policymakers announce a fully independent inquiry by a prominent commission or institution, the less likely that blaming will escalate for the time pending the inquiry.* Contingent upon the assignments and conclusions of the inquiry commission, a blame game can still spark off when the inquiry report holds government actors responsible (see Brändström and Kuipers 2003). Timely assigning investigations to prominent (but non-incumbent) politicians made political escalation less likely in Finland than in Sweden and Norway. Also, the Finnish inquiry committee specifically focused on improving the existing crisis management preparedness and communication structures rather than on accountability for failures made. The timing and form of inquiry certainly served to de-politicize the crisis in Finland. In Sweden, the delay in assigning an inquiry was compared to the swift action in Finland and it was therefore met with more impatience by critics than might otherwise have been the case.

The third factor of importance is the mitigating effect of manipulating political opposition. We learned from the Finnish case in particular, that generous public apologies by the incumbent government and recognition of their own failure may have a cushioning effect on the subsequent debate. We therefore hypothesize for further research that: *The sooner the government acknowledges mistakes of its own, the less room for intense criticism by the opposition.* Proactive, unforced government self-criticism robs the opposition of the opportunity to lash out at it. It leaves opponents no option but to agree with the government's own statements, and support its intention to remedy the errors made. However, government actors need to strike a balance in proactively taking on responsibilities and encouraging other actors to also take their share of responsibility.

It is necessary to further test the relation between political escalation and personal and material damage. In this study the link between escalation of blame and the size of the damage was fairly straightforward (in contrast to Bovens

53 Ögren, M (2005); Dagens Nyheter, 7 January 2004, 11 January 2005, 14 January 2005; Svenska Dagbladet, 31 December 2004, 7 January 2005.

and 't Hart 1996; Bovens et al. 1999): the hardest-hit country also manifested the toughest accountability process. Nevertheless, the comparison also brought striking differences in actor behavior during the accountability processes in the three countries to the surface. Blame games turned out to be short-lived when generous public apologies are made early on by a country's political leaders and when timely investigations are started. Some strategies that were successfully employed in one country were less successful in another, because of institutional factors such as centralization of authority and the lack of designated agencies to take responsibility. This chapter has shed some light on explanations for diverging blame games in similar situations. When political leaders fail to manage blame in a crisis characterized by considerable damage or threat, they create for themselves a crisis after the crisis.

Chapter 5: Chasing evil, defending atrocities: Blame avoidance and prisoner abuse during the war in Iraq[54]

Sanneke Kuipers, Kasia Kochanska and Annika Brändström

5.1 Introduction

In 2004, the world witnessed in horror, through a series of pictures that were leaked to US media, how US soldiers stationed in the Abu Ghraib prison had physically, sexually, and psychologically abused Iraqi prisoners (Hersh, 2004). The pictures instigated a heated debate on blame and accountability regarding the atrocities American troops had exposed their prisoners of war (POWs) to. The focus of criticism soon shifted up the chain of command, to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and the Bush administration's decision to disregard the Geneva Convention and applying the term *illegal* combatants in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Around the same time, UK soldiers stationed in Iraq were accused of similar practices: torturing prisoners and even killing one of their detainees.[55] Investigations disclosed that the body of the deceased suspect, who had never received a fair trial, sustained 93 separate injuries caused by severe physical abuse at the hands of his British captors.[56] The British army was quick to frame the situation as an isolated and tragic event that every member of the regiment "bitterly regrets" (Stevenson and Weaver, 2009). The case received much media

54 This chapter was first published as: Kuipers, Sanneke, Kasia Kochanska, and Annika Brändström (2011) "Chasing evil, defending atrocities: Blame avoidance and prisoner abuse during the war in Iraq." In *Ethics and Crisis Management*, edited by Lina Svedin. Information Age Publishing.

55 The case of Baha Musa became public after a video showing the abuse was revealed.

56 Musa was tortured to death one day after his detention.

attention within the UK and led to the conviction of a low ranking army official but did not spark much of a debate on British army institutions nor did it seriously compromise the British minister of defense or other politically responsible actors.

That media accounts of unethical behavior in crisis situations lead to politicization and blame avoidance among responsible actors is hardly surprising. But why do blame game outcomes differ, when violations of core values are so similar? This chapter aims to shed new light on the relationship between unethical behavior in times of crisis and the accountability and blaming processes that follow. Does the ethical dimension by nature lead to a truth finding dialogue, and does it influence the intensity of politicization and the outcome of blaming?

5.2 Blame avoidance theory

Blame avoidance research identifies three strategies for officeholders trying to avoid responsibility for their own or subordinates' wrongdoings (Hood et al., 2009). These three strategies are (1) agency strategies: avoiding blame by limiting formal responsibility through delegation (cf. Hood, 2002), (2) policy strategies: avoiding blame by designing policies that obscure the causal relation between officeholder and outcome of his or her decisions (cf. Weaver, 1986; Pierson, 1994), (3) presentational strategies: avoiding blame by framing events and manipulating public and media perception (McGraw, 1990; Brändström and Kuipers, 2003; Hood et al., 2009). This study will focus on presentational strategies, after the blameworthy event has occurred. Presentational strategies constitute actual crisis management strategies as they aim to mitigate the (possible) eruption of a firestorm of criticism after a major public service mistake has taken place.

When things are perceived to have gone wrong in government, office-holders will try to avoid responsibility. They can resort to rhetorical strategies to escape blame, including moves to deflect blame onto others. In defense, their opponents do the same. And so a *blame game* develops: a verbal struggle about the allocation of responsibility for policy mistakes or negative events.[57] We claim there are three core components to the framing strategies in blame games:

4. *Constructing severity:* depicting events as violations of core public values;
5. *Constructing agency:* depicting events as operational incidents or as symptoms of endemic problems;
6. *Constructing responsibility:* depicting events as caused by a single actor or by 'many hands'.[58]

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57 A 'frame' refers to "the production of facts, images and spectacles aimed at manipulating the perception and reaction to a crisis" (Boin et al, 2005: 88) and 'framing' can relate to both the use and the impact of frames (e.g. Edelman, 1988: Schön and Rein, 1994; Kingdon, 1995; Iyengar, 1996; D'Angelo, 2002; DeVreese, 2003; Hurst, 2004; Eriksson, 2004).

58 The problem of many hands was first coined by Thompson, 1980.

A blame game is a staged process. It involves deliberate choices by actors to frame a particular failure and its causality. The selective adoption of framing strategies by political elites and their skills in adopting them will result in different outcomes of political blaming (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). Let us first examine each of these strategies in turn.

Constructing severity

The degree to which an event is framed as a violation of core public values (security, integrity, social justice etc.) determines whether that event becomes 'politicized': subject of a critical political and societal debate. Actors will struggle to dominate this debate with their interpretations of the event. Personal, political and organizational gains and losses are at stake in this process (Edelman, 1977; 1988; 't Hart 1993; Boin et al., 2008). Media are explicitly biased towards negative events (good news is no news). Voters are also punishing officeholders harder for negative actions than rewarding them for good behavior. The negativity bias in electoral behavior instructs politicians to duck accountability whenever possible (Bloom and Price, 1975; Lau, 1985). Highlighting governmental failures is a powerful weapon in the hands of political opponents. Therefore officeholders will seek to deprive their opponents of this opportunity, by denying or re-framing failure, or by passing the buck to others (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003).

Following McGraw (1991) we distinguish blame avoidance from blame management.[59] Blame avoidance refers to the denial of blameworthiness or 'severity': incidents are framed as inconsequential, not negative in their social implications, or as lacking political ramifications.[60] In the domain of misfortune, expert judgment or confidentiality/secrecy, the blame game is likely to fade out. By contrast, if wrongdoings are framed as a violation of substantive values such as justice, democracy, liberty (Nelkin, 1975) or national security (Edelman, 1977; Bostdorff, 1994; Buzan et al., 1998), a blame firestorm may erupt. When a story about negative political performance does catch on, attempts at blame avoidance have run their course and give way to blame management strategies, which accountable actors employ to avoid being pinpointed as culpable and/or responsible for the problems that have been identified (McGraw, 1991: 1135).

Constructing agency

Once journalists, interest groups or oppositional politicians have detected a potential scandal, they will put questions about responsibility on the table. Whereas officeholders attempt to point at incidental, ad hoc causal factors in an

59 See also Sulitzeanu-Kenan (2010) and Hood (2002).

60 I.e., beyond the realm of political affairs such as "the free market, the private sphere or matters for expert decision" (Buzan et al., 1998: 29).

otherwise sound system, their critics will portray any wrongdoings as epitomizing a much larger systemic failure (Brändström et al., 2008). So, in temporal terms, incumbent elites trying to manage blame will emphasize the immediate causes, such as *human error* or *rule violations* by lower level operators to explain what went wrong. By contrast, the accused will stress a broader time perspective in order to shift focus to powerful underlying causes, such as the relevant regulations, government cutbacks, organizational routines, and cultures tolerant of rule violation.[61]

Going back in time often means going up the hierarchy, from street-level operators to top-level strategic policy makers (Bovens and 't Hart, 1996). The latter are thus usually keen to narrowly define the scope of investigation and debate while their critics will want to broaden the time horizon and deepen the scope of post-mortems. Operators and middle managers who feel their superiors are trying to frame them as scapegoats will feed the debate by leaking implicating information about their superiors to media or opposition critics (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). Successfully framing a failure in narrow technical terms decreases the likelihood of escalating blame games in terms of political implications and sanctions. Only if the problem becomes perceived in wider systemic terms, will blame games affect political fates.

Constructing responsibility

When the frame has been established on the agency dimension, the question remains who exactly should be punished. Incumbent policymakers tend to argue that the incident is the result of a *network* failure: a complex interplay of structures, actors, and decisions. Network causality makes responsibility for failures a matter of the proverbial *many hands*. If causality is *dispersed*, then any blame will have to be dispersed too and sanctions are not administered to anyone (Thompson, 1980).

By contrast, pinning down the root of failure to individuals or parts of organizations will facilitate scapegoat solutions (Ellis, 1994; Rochefort and Cobb, 1994; Jones, 2000). When incumbent politicians succeed in defining such a diagnosis of a critical event, they can relieve pressure on themselves by signaling that they are ready to take steps: firing subordinates and implementing additional measures to deal with the problem (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003).

5.3 Synthesis: The blaming tree framework

A blame game is a staged process, where each stage presents different alternatives, depicted in figure 5.1 as branches of a *blaming tree*. These alternative options

61 See an overview of such factors in Vaughan (1999).

influence the course of the blaming process, resulting in either of four different outcomes. Firstly, the event can be framed as either ad hoc or endemic, depending on the time perspective that becomes the dominant reference frame in the debates. Subsequently, both stand-alone incidents and systemic failures can be attributed to either complex networks or single actors. The resultant locus of blame is: (i) the scapegoat, an isolated single actor failure, (ii) the organizational mishap, an incident produced by 'many hands', (iii) failing policy maker(s), responsible for shaping flawed policies and/or organizational malpractices, and (iv) the endemic system failure, a structural problem implicating many actors in a range of organizations (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). The framework is illustrated in chapter 2.

Now, why and how do accountability processes lead to different outcomes? Comparative research will reveal under which conditions certain framing strategies are likely to be successful in (re)directing the post-crisis media onslaught, to avoid being blamed, to focus blame on others, or to successfully disperse blame among many hands. *The blaming tree* serves to analyze the cases and understand how the blame games evolved.[62] Our assumption here is that the behavior of accountable actors in the end defines the public's perception of the crisis as either a *single actor deficiency*, *organizational mishap*, *failing governance* or a *system failure*. The behavior of actors is in turn influenced by a mix of situational, individual and institutional factors.

5.4 Severity of events: Public shame and blame?

The cases discussed here are the type where the severity of events seems beyond dispute and in this chapter we will have a closer look at how actors managed blame and to what results. Picture of abused POWS, and the autopsy report of the tortured body indicate we are dealing with severe unethical behavior committed by American and British soldiers and possibly sanctioned by their governments.

Figure 5.1 portrays the critical attention by the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* on the abuse of the Iraqi prisoners. The negative publicity towards the US seems disproportional to that directed at the UK, though from 2006 onwards attention for the British case in the Guardian shows an upward trend. Given the fact that the allegations were similar, the question rises why these blame games took a different course and to what extent the countries' political leadership was held responsible.

62 The comparative design of this study allows us to delve deeper into these cases in order to identify specific factors that influenced the blaming process and, consequently, its outcomes.

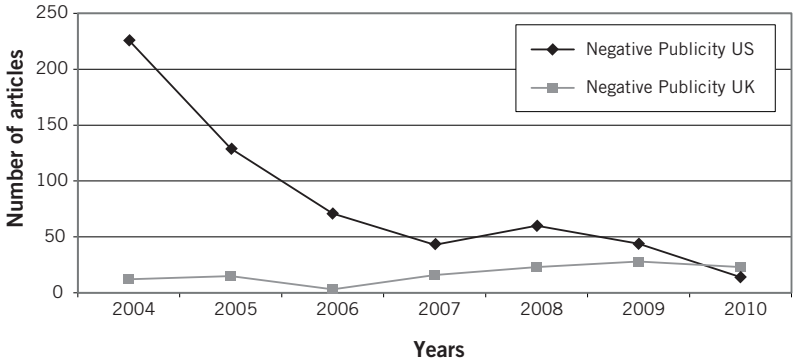

Figure 5.1: Negative publicity in the New York Times and the Guardian

Before moving to an analysis of the blame management strategies that were employed in the two cases, we first need to substantiate our core claim that blame was attributed differently in the two cases. At the international level criticism (including *naming* and *shaming*) on the US and UK by intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will indicate the level and direction of blame attribution. At the national level we look at national public inquires performed after 2004, and to what extent these inquiries attributed responsibility to the US and UK governments.

Blame on the International Arena: IGOs and NGOs

The International Criminal Court (ICC) provides 341[63] entries on the Abu Ghraib case (ICC Advanced Search Engine, 2010). The United States is a non-member of the ICC, and therefore the Court does not have legal rights to interfere with the state's affairs. Regardless, the ICC provides information (such as newspaper articles, the reports of NGOs and democratic inquiries) regarding the cases of abuse of the Iraqi prisoners performed by the American soldiers, as a form of shaming'. The ICC has no references to the British abuse case[64] and therefore does not intentionally shame the UK for the cases of POW abuse.

63 All the information regarding the Abu Ghraib case can be found in the Court's two official languages (English and French), where ninety-three references are to be found in English and as much as two hundred forty two are available in French (ICC Advanced Search Engine, 2010).

64 The only keyword yielding four entries is Basra, but these entries include no relation to the abuse by the British soldiers. The maltreatment of the Iraqi prisoners performed by the UK troops stationing in Iraq is known as the Baha Mousa case. The pictures of Mousa's tortured body triggered attention of the national media and served as a symbol of abuse of Iraqi detainees done by British soldiers. Therefore Baha Mousa was used as keyword when searching for information on the abuse performed by British soldiers in Iraq. The supportive keywords when searching for information available on the matter were Donald Payne (a convicted soldier), Basra (a detention centre where Mousa was interrogated) and abuse/UK soldiers/ Iraq.

The United Nations search engine yields 29 entries on US involvement in the abuse of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib and also links the Abu Ghraib events to other instances of US torture. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay depicted Abu Ghraib as an example of the US violating the Convention against Torture (CAT), saying: "The Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prisons (…) became high-profile symbols of the practice of torture. New terms such as 'water-boarding' and 'rendition' entered the public discourse, as human rights lawyers and advocates looked on in dismay" (UN News, 26 June 2009). The UN did not produce any documents regarding British abuse of Iraqi detainees. This indicates that the UN did not apply any sanction on the country in regard to that matter.

The table below (see table 5.1) presents the number of references to the US and the UK cases of torture made by four different NGOs during the same time period.

Table 5.1: Number of references to the US and UK cases of abuse as reported by NGOs

Name of the NGO	# of entries US case	# entries UK case
Amnesty International	196	11
International Committee of the Red Cross	8	1
Centre for Research on Globalization	9	0
Human Rights Watch	213	3

Many more entries surfaced criticizing the US. than the UK. during the same time period. NGOs recognized that the British offences took place, but overall they did not criticize British institutions, policy makers or their positions. Criticism directed at the US focused, apart from the specifics of Abu Ghraib, on bad leadership, long standing malpractices and the fundamental flaws in the US *war on terrorism*.

Blame on the National Scene: Public inquiries

In order to identify culpable parties and assess the severity of their wrongdoings, national governments can appoint inquiries (by court procedures, parliamentary inquires or other public audits) to hold individuals and organizations accountable.

Inquires in the United States

Between 2003 and 2008 the US Army conducted five investigations into the interrogation methods applied to detainees by US soldiers. In July 2003, Amnesty had informed the US ministry of defense of the abuse.[65] The US ministry of

65 On 23 July, Amnesty International announced that it received reports regarding prisoners abused performed by the Coalition forces (Associated Press, 7 May 2004: 5).

defense asked General Ryder to investigate the allegations. On 5 November 2003, Ryder reported problems with all US-led Iraqi prisons. Ryder's report, however, only focused on recommendations, not on establishing culpability.

In January 2004, General Taguba and his investigators specifically looked at the cases of abuse performed by military police officers in the Abu Ghraib prison. They concluded that the Abu Ghraib units run by the military police "lacked discipline, had no training whatsoever and lacked leadership presence"[66] (Burlas, 2004). Furthermore, the abuse was framed as "systematic and illegal and suggested that the problem might be far reaching" (Lobe, 2 May 2004: par. 10–11). Taguba requested legal action against the members of the US Army and the two civilian contractors involved (ibid: par. 8). Army reports provided by Fay and later Jones focused mainly on the role of intelligence units in the abuse of prisoners.[67] According to these reports high rank officials knew of the abuse at Abu Ghraib but had failed to stop it. Fay's report concluded that the primary cause of the maltreatment was misconduct by a small number of soldiers, made possible by lack of leadership.

A bipartisan US Senate report released in December 2008 concluded that Donald Rumsfeld and other senior Bush administration officials were responsible for the interrogation techniques performed in Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and Afghanistan (Morgan, 11 December 2008). In the executive summary to the report, General David Petraeus stated that: "[t]he abuse of detainees in US custody cannot simply be attributed to the actions of 'a few bad apples' acting on their own. The fact is that the senior officials in the United States government solicited information on how to use aggressive techniques, redefined the law to create the appearance of their legality, and authorized their use against detainees" (Senate Armed Services Inquiry, 10 May 2007).

Inquiries in the United Kingdom

The death of British captive Baha Mousa triggered three different inquires: by the royal military police, a court martial and the parliament. The royal military police' investigation into Baha Mousa's death was completed in April 2004, but its findings never reached the public eye.

The UK army conducted their own investigation, which resulted in the detention of seven soldiers (Stevenson and Weaver, 13 July 2007: para. 7). The soldiers were charged with offences of "inhuman treatment, battery and assault, manslaughter, perverting the course of justice, and, in the case of the three senior officers, negligently performing a duty". Only one soldier was convicted (Stevenson and Weaver, 13 July 2007). Mousa's family demanded an independent inquiry (Norton-Taylor, 29 July 2004). In December 2004 the British

66 An answer given by Taguba to one of the senators in reply to why Abu Ghraib happened.

67 The previous reports on crimes to Iraqi detainees were mainly focused on the low rank officials.

High Court decided that an independent inquiry should be conducted. In May 2008, secretary of defense Des Brown, finally ordered such a public inquiry into Mousa's death. He argued that the inquiries by the royal military police and the court martial had created more questions than answers about the incident (Baha Mousa Public Inquiry, 2010).

5.5 Attributing agency

As soon as the initial struggle over severity is over, and the perception of a *crisis* has taken hold, the question how this could have happened becomes highly relevant to political actors, institutional watchdogs and other critics. The policy makers held responsible are more likely to downplay the scope of the events, where their opponents will try to present the crisis as a part of a bigger problem.

Abu Ghraib as a structural problem

The US involvement in the Iraq war and the overall dissatisfaction with policies of the Bush administration (which divided the country ever since its photo finish victory in the 2000 elections) increased the belief that Abu Ghraib was part of a larger systemic failure. Additionally, Bush's second term lasted from right before the scandal in 2004 until 2008 allowed the opposition to collect near-complete evidence that the Abu Ghraib abuses were part of an endemic failure. After the Abu Ghraib pictures were revealed the Bush administration tried to portray the issue as a stand-alone incident caused by a few rotten apples. In reaction to the pictures, Defense Spokesman Larry DiRita said that "no responsible official of the Department of Defense approved any program that could conceivably have been intended to result in such abuses" (Barry et al., 2004).

Former Vice-President Al Gore declared that the Bush administration ''shamed America" with its policy on Iraq, and called for the resignations of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, CIA Director Tenet and National Security Adviser Rice, ''What happened at that prison, it is now clear, is not the result of random acts of a few bad apples," Gore said. ''It was the natural consequence of the Bush administration policy" (NY Times, 27 May 2004).

It soon became public that Amnesty International had informed US officials about abuse taking place, already in July 2003 (Washington Post, 5 October 2004). In response to this information the US army conducted two separate investigations, resulting in contradictory guidelines on interrogation of Iraqi detainees. The Miller Inquiry (September 2003) suggested that prison guards (who later became the offenders on the Abu Ghraib pictures) should be given the task of setting conditions for interrogations. The investigation led by General Ryder (November 2003), on the contrary, stated that the military police (prison guards) should not take part in interrogation procedures. A further problem in portraying the matter as an ad hoc incident was the Taguba Report released in

January 2004. The fact that crimes within the US led prisons were being investigated and sanctioned even before the Abu Ghraib pictures reached the public eye, added suspicion to the case.

The issue fully politicized on 22 June 2004 when information about the so-called *2002 Secret Memos* was made public. The memos signed by George W. Bush justified torturing al-Qaeda members as one way to reach the objectives of the *war on terror*. Meanwhile, the president insisted repeatedly that: "...the US does not torture and that's important for people around the world to realize".[68] From that moment on the opposition and media searched for evidence that Abu Ghraib was another indicator of unethical behavior at the highest level of government. New facts supporting such claims started piling up. In July 2006 the US Congress decided that the Third Geneva Convention indeed applied to members of al-Qaeda. Yet in 2007[69] and 2008[70] the world learned that the Bush administration had continuously approved harsh interrogation methods on alleged al-Qaeda members.

High ranking officials' involvement in creating secret memos was finally confirmed in 2009 when US President Barack Obama (elected in 2008) decided to make those documents public. As a newly elected democratic president Obama, who opposed the Iraq war and Bush's politics in general, had no interest in hiding the information. He could safely release the documents without being held accountable, and had no interest in protecting his predecessor. Thus, together with the revealed torture memos the case ended. The *Secret Memos* signed by representatives of the Bush administration confirmed full implication of high-level government officials and firmly supported that the Abu Ghraib case was a symptom of structural failure.

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68 Television interview, 5 May, 2004; Press release by the White House 29 November, 2005; Press statement on CNN, 5 October, 2007. In fact, in June 26, 2003 in an address on the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, President Bush had stated "I call on all governments to join with the United States and the community of law-abiding nations in prohibiting, investigating, and prosecuting all acts of torture and in undertaking to prevent other cruel and unusual punishment. I call on all nations to speak out against torture in all its forms and to make ending torture an essential part of their diplomacy" (Sullivan, October 2009: 10).

69 On the 4th of October 2007 The New York Times revealed a new proof of the Department's of Justice 2005 memos serving as a prove of harsh interrogation methods approved by the Roberto R. Gonzales (Rich, 14 October 2007).

70 The Justice Department disclosed a memorandum written by Mr. Yoo in March 2003. The document permitted armed forces interrogators to amply torture methods in examining prisoners and stated that "wartime powers largely exempted interrogations from laws banning harsh treatment " (Johnston and Shane, 2008).

Baha Mousa as a technical error

The scope of discussion on the death of Baha Mousa has been stretched over the past years. Great Britain has had six different ministers of defense and a similar political turnover as the United States (welcoming Conservatives in office in May 2010). The number of high-level officials involved in the case, a broad time frame, and a change in governing powers affected the accountability process and helped to frame the Baha Mousa case as a technical error.

When officials could no longer ignore the case of Baha Mousa, the reaction of long-term Minister of Defence Geoff Hoon was to portray the event as a one-time incident, framing it as a technical error. When presenting the case before Parliament in May 2004, Hoon insisted that "the unauthorized actions of a very few must not be allowed to undermine the outstanding work of tens of thousands British soldiers and civilians" (The Guardian, 11 May 2004: par. 1). Until the end of his incumbency in 2005 Hoon opposed an independent inquiry into the Mousa case and the application of the European Convention of Human Rights (and therefore questioned that central public values have been violated), stating that: "the security situation [in Iraq] does not permit all deaths to be investigated in the same way as would happen in peacetime Europe" (The Guardian, 14 December 2004: par. 8).

By the time John Reid was appointed Minister of Defense and the British High Court ruled that ECHR applied to British troops in Basra, the opposition called for an independent inquiry into the Mousa case, and evidence that the unethical practice was common started piling up.[71] Following the steps of his predecessor, Reid claimed that the abuses were a technical error committed by a few rotten apples. Defending British soldiers' actions in Iraq he questioned the decision by the High Court. Des Brown, who succeeded Reid in 2006, by contrast acknowledged the ECHR applied to Basra and admitted that the British, although involving only a few soldiers, violated human rights of the Iraqis when applying their interrogation methods. Brown's non-aggressive, apologetic stance proved successful and finally, the creation of an independent inquiry diminished the opposition's argument that the government tried to cover up the case.

On 12 May 2010 the Labor Party passed the power to the Conservatives. Once in power, the members of the Conservative party had no interest in digging deeper into the matter and await the conclusions of the public inquiry.

Overall, the Labour cabinet managed to portray the Baha Mousa case as a technical, one time error. The opposition did not succeed in framing the abuse as a bigger and more complex problem where the political system, rather than

71 Until the day of writing, end 2010, there are 33 cases being investigated in relation to the UK's involvement in instances of brutal behavior to detainees in Iraq (Batty and Percival, 14 November 2009:1).

individual actors, would have been blamed. The constantly changing of ministers of defense and a broad time frame made it difficult to present the Baha Mousa case as an outcome of fundamental problems within the British politics. Until the Baha Mousa inquiry presents it findings the case will still be perceived as caused by a few rotten apples without system implications.

5.6 Assessing responsibility: Single actor or many hands?

After the framed has been established at the operational or strategic level, stakeholders are left with the question whom to punish for the unwanted events. Operational incidents direct attention to lower-level actors (easy scapegoats). Alternatively, culprits in defense can always turn to the argument of a network failure which leads to dispersing responsibility among the so-called *many hands* (Brändström et al., 2008: 174). If causality is dispersed, then any blame will have to be too. If the unwanted event is perceived as a bigger, structural problem, higher level officials are in focus. Rotten apples become a *rotten barrel* in which the most senior leaders should be called to account (ibid.: 299). When even punishing top level officials is insufficient, and events are seen as systemic failure, painful reforms and drastic policy change are nearly inevitable (ibid.: 303).

Abu Ghraib: A systemic network failure

Eleven lower ranking officials were charged of crimes in relation to the Abu Ghraib abuse. Charles Graner, a former private first class in the US Army and the ringleader in Abu Ghraib was disciplined with the longest punishment delivered: ten years in prison (Zernike, 16 January 2005: par. 1). Ex-Private Lynndie England, known also as *a lady with the leash*[72] received three years of detention (Mestrovic, 2006: 188).

By immediately sentencing the *few rotten apples* in court martials, the Bush administration intended to close the Abu Ghraib case and label it an isolated *ad hoc* failure. Nevertheless, scapegoating can only be effective when critical events are not (yet) widely perceived as endemic, structural problems. The discussion on Abu Ghraib had already moved from the people to the controversial policies of the Bush administration. When government's memorandums authorizing implementation of *enhanced interrogation techniques* were revealed in June 2004, the buck could no longer be stopped.

To re-allocate the blame, the White House pointed at Janis Karpinski, the brigadier general responsible for the Abu Ghraib prison who was deferred from her post as a commander of the 800th Military Police Brigade and demoted to

72 On one of the pictures portraying the Abu Ghraib abuse England is photographed with what appears to be a leash attached to one of the detainee's neck (Raleigh, 5 July 2004).

the rank of colonel (Zagorin, 10 November 2006: par. 2). When accused, the ex-general told the media of the administration's involvement in creating controversial policies resulting in torture practices. Karpinski explained that General Geoffrey Miller[73] had said, during a visit to the Abu Ghraib prison: "Look, you have to treat them like dogs. If they ever feel like anything more than dogs, you have effectively lost control of the interrogation" (Democracy Now, 24 October 2007: 5). Additionally, Karpinski stated: "It was clear the knowledge and responsibility goes all the way to the top of the chain of command to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld" (Zagorin, 10 November 2006: 2).

These accusations from Karpinski came on top of the *Secret Memo's* revealing government's involvement in authorizing the torture techniques. Critics therefore further zoomed in on the actions of Rumsfeld. Additionally, various investigations[74] into the Abu Ghraib scandal indicated active involvement of officials at all levels in the hierarchy, including the very top. In an attempt to stop further accusations, Rumsfeld apologized to the US Congress taking full responsibility for Abu Ghraib in May 2004. Rumsfeld offered his resignation to President Bush twice, but was on both occasions asked by the president to stay in office (BBC News, 15 April 2006: par. 20). Bush believed that Rumsfeld was doing a "fine job" at a very difficult time – when the nation was at war and the military undergoing major restructuring" (ibid.: par. 21).

In December 2008, the US Senate found Rumsfeld responsible for the cases of abuse performed by American soldiers abroad. A bipartisan Senate report written by senators Levin and McCain concluded that Rumsfeld and other senior officials were to blame for the interrogation techniques used in Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and Afghanistan (Morgan, 11 December 2008).

When the incriminating pictures were first made public, the primary reaction of the Bush administration had been to blame a few rotten apples and to portray the problem as an operational, one time occurrence. The policymakers then intended to assign responsibility to General Janis Karpinski, which backlashed at the Bush administration, as the general started implicating the top of the chain of command. Additionally, the media found evidence that the Bush administration structurally permitted the use of illegal torture procedures in its detention centers in Afghanistan and Guántanamo Bay. This indicated systemic failure, a crisis as a product of fundamentally flawed systems of policy-making or service delivery. This outcome makes major policy change hard to avoid irrespective of the political fate of the incumbent elite (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003: 303).

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73 At the time Miller was sent to the Abu Ghraib detention centre by Rumsfeld, he headed the Guantánamo Prison. The main purpose of Miller's visit to Abu Ghraib in 2003 was to increase the effectiveness of the interrogation techniques performed by the military intelligence.

74 The Ryder Report (13 October – 6 November, 2003);The Taguba Report (31 January 2004. Findings on 12 March, 2004); Fay and the Schlesinger Reports (August 2004); Report Senate Armed Services Committee, 2008.

Aware of the increasing scope of the problem, the Bush administration felt forced to point at a culpable party within its own political camp. Rumsfeld seemed like a right person for the job. Rumsfeld drew the attention away from others, including the President, involved in creating the controversial policies. Rumsfeld admitting full responsibility to US Congress in May 2004 had to close the case once and for all. However, it did not stop the discussion on blame for Abu Ghraib did not cease, nor did it stop journalists from digging into evidence for other offences in other prisons.

The more evidence pointed to Rumsfeld's involvement in the Abu Ghraib scandal, the more the President seemed willing to keep him in the office. Finally, in 2006 Bush approved Rumsfeld's resignation after the Congressional elections. Rumsfeld was never convicted in Court. After his resignation more high-ranking officials became linked to the scandal. In December 2008, a few months before the end of Bush's electoral term, a report by the Senate Armed Services Committee into Abu Ghraib concluded that Rumsfeld and other Pentagon officials had created policies, from December 2001 onwards, that eventually led to the prisoner abuse in the Abu Ghraib prison.[75]

Baha Mousa: An ad hoc actor failure

In the UK, framing the death of Baha Mousa as an ad hoc incident allowed for scapegoating of lower level officials. Although seven soldiers of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment were charged in court martial in 2007 for their involvement in Baha Mousa's death, only one of them was convicted. All other charges were rejected due to lack of evidence (Morris and Gillan, 2007).

Colonel Jorge Mendonca, the highest in rank military official to be charged, said, when asked about responsibility regarding Mousa's death: "As the commanding officer of that unit, yes, I do accept that responsibility" (Norton-Taylor, 7 June 2010: paragraph 5). Mendonca temporarily stopped the buck. He did however express his belief that he was *hung out to dry* by his commanders (ibid.). A typical scapegoat for ritual sacrifice in the face of public criticism, he allowed senior office-holders to survive scandal and demonstrate resolute *crisis management* (cf. Brändström and Kuipers, 2003: 298).

In the meantime, the lawyers working for Mousa's family managed in 2008 to instigate a public inquiry into his death. The investigation committee is presently (2010) investigating the involvement of the higher level officials (Shiner and Gregory, 3 July 2010: par. 1) and the role of the ministry of defense as an institution. Its findings and conclusions are expected by the end of 2010. Only recently evidence of other instances of abuse surfaced. The current independent inquiry into the Baha Mousa case revealed more indications of structural abuse

75 http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/12/washington/12detainee.html

(Norton-Taylor, 16 March 2010). In 2009, Human Rights Watch launched a report presenting the UK's involvement in torture committed on UK nationals suspected of terrorist activities in Pakistan. These abuses took place between 2003 and 2006 (Cobain, 29 April 2008: par. 5 and 15 July 2008: par. 6).[76]

The British case initially showed a strong relation between the scope of the event and the allocation of blame. The death of Baha Mousa for a long seemed to be a stand-alone event and a technical error caused by a few rotten apples, allowing attribution of responsibility for the abuse to lower level officials.

5.7 Conclusion

The dynamics of the blame games on the two similar cases of detainee abuse by representatives of the government differed considerably. In the first years, the US case seemed to grow bigger and bigger unveiling more and more indications of endemic system failure. Meanwhile, the British discussion was not fueled by constant news of other instances of abuse. It would take until 2009 before additional evidence of British misconduct leaked out. In retrospect, the British government may have been no less guilty of structural violation of human rights than the Bush administration in the *War on Terror*. However, by the time the world could see the UK case in its true proportion, the responsible politicians had been replaced by their opponents, who had no interest in further escalating the issue. By contrast, the Bush administration took the full blaze of criticism during its incumbency, suffering by the hand of a host of critics who seized every opportunity to hammer another nail into Rumsfeld's coffin.

When analyzing the blame appointed to the US and UK governments by international organizations it is hardly surprising that their critique focused on US actions. The US government took a leading role in the 'War on Terror', thereby placing its officials in the line of fire. However this should not be relevant for the blame appointed in national arenas.

The analysis on the attribution of agency and responsibility within the respective cases shows an interesting deviation in the rhetorical defense of the accused. The Bush administration continued to insist that it did not torture people in the face of a shower of evidence to the contrary. Unintentionally admitting the widespread involvement of all levels of government, the White House first pointed to military officers on the ground in Iraq (such as Graner and England), then to their superiors (such as Karpinski), and then the top brass (Rumsfeld) in an attempt to contain the case. In the end, Rumsfeld had to hang in front of the White House.

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76 The report, titled "Cruel Britannia: British Complicity in the Torture and Ill-treatment of Terror Suspects" (Human Rights Watch, 24 November 2009) describes cases of British individuals of subjected to brutal interrogation methods performed by the Pakistani Intelligence Agency in cooperation with the UK's Security Services (MI5) and the UK's Secret Intelligence Agency (MI6).

The Blair government representatives initially reacted in much the same way as their US counterparts, pointing to a few rotten apples that had committed specific incidental acts. However, simultaneously, successive ministers of defense in the UK emphasized that those acts were committed in a situation of war, and that it should perhaps be seen as excessive, but necessary acts in combating terrorism. The crucial difference here is that they managed to maintain credibility with the public and the media by admitting a controversial military approach. Six consecutive incumbent ministers shared responsibility over a seven year period, which did the rest to disperse blame and avoid political consequences.

Comparison between these cases shows how disregard of ethics in managing an international relations crisis (the *War on Terror*) led to this national blame game for government leaders. However, ethical considerations also seem to have little place in the blame management strategies by incumbent elites. Independent of how we judge the abuse, the British incumbents were more effective in managing an 'ethics crisis' and more strategically re-allocated blame compared to their American colleagues. We found the key to their effectiveness in the proportionality of their reaction: a few British military were scapegoated while allegations were in correspondence with sanctions at that level, whereas the US government tried to scapegoat soldiers when all levels of government were already implicated by the information revealed. Though little helpful in making this world a better place in terms of ethical behavior in crisis management, the findings on credibility and proportionality in this study may very well prove insightful in future crisis cases.

Chapter 6: Crisis, accountability, blame management and ministerial careers: The Netherlands[77]

Annika Brändström and Marij Swinkels

6.1 Introduction

When a journalist asked the former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan what leaders should fear most he replied: 'Events, dear boy, events'. It is not the amount of policy documents and cabinet decision-making procedures that test leadership resistance the most, but it is the unexpected events. Crisis event are ultimate to uncover the non-routine response and learning strategies of those in power. In times of crisis, ministers can either be honored or penalized for the actions they take and it requires both leadership and political skill to manage a crisis and its aftermath. Political leaders are at the same time subject to a range of forces: mass media, parliamentary inquiries, (restraints of) the political system, legislation and the political opposition and national politics may influence their behavior and possibilities to act. This chapter will address the crisis aftermath; the turbulence of assigning accountability and learning processes that may impact upon future careers of those politically appointed leaders who are there to manage the crisis. We will examine ministerial turnover in the Netherlands with and

77 This chapter was first published as: Brändström, Annika and Marij Swinkels (2015) "Crisis accountability and career management in the Netherlands" In *Organizing After Crisis*, edited by Nathalie Schiffino, Laurent Taskin, Celine Donis, and Julien Raone. Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing Group.

attempt to contextualize levels of learning as part (and result) of crisis-induced accountability and impact on ministerial turnover.

The acute response needs to be in balance with the post-crisis investigations, the restoration of a sense of normalcy and at the same time measures to improve and implement reform should be addressed (Boin, 2009). These measures can end up being symbolical and serve as 'quick fixes' in organizations or mandates, preserving the overall structure. This is the most commonly identified crisis-learning pattern, referred to as 'single loop learning' (Boin, 2009). Learning with more deep-rooted changes that have longer-term impact are referred to as 'double-loop learning' (Argyris and Schön, 1978), and are less associated with crisis (Boin, 2009). This kind of double-loop or *institutional* learning (reformulation of policy problems, scope and goal) is often hindered during politicized crisis accountability situations and for many different reasons. However, learning can take place on other levels as well. May (1992) for example, distinguishes *policy learning* (social and instrumental) from that of *political learning* in which policy actors become more sophisticated in advancing their arguments and improving their framing strategies and political tactics.

The high risk and variety of responses of political leaders at stake during crisis leads us to the central question of this chapter: why some appointed cabinet ministers manage to stay in office despite high crisis accountability pressures and blame attribution, whereas others that have been under seemingly the same substantial accountability pressures, do not? Following May's (1992) distinction, we know that political learning by key political officeholders is likely after crisis. However, in line with the attempts of this book to identify and encompass learning on several levels we will also examine the potential effects of post-crisis accountability pressures on the less expected changes in policies/institutions as a result of learning (see for example the IRT case study of Dekker et al., 2000). We view crisis management as a key public leadership challenge to face the public pressure and openly assess, explain and account for unfolding crisis events through meaning-making activities (Boin et al., 2005; Boin, 2009) when faced with threats to core values to contain or avoid an escalation of accountability pressures (Boin, 2009; Masters and 't Hart, 2012) or triggers of defensive routines that can hamper the crisis management ('t Hart, 1993). The political communication that often follows can have profound effects on the careers of top political actors and the futures of governing institutions (Boin, 2009; Hood, 2009; Boin et al., 2010; Coombs, 2011).

In parliamentary systems the leadership tasks of political crisis management falls to the cabinet that consists of (portfolio) ministers and the Prime Minister. In a crisis, ministers who are seen as compromising or mismanaging their responsibilities can suffer undermined public and parliamentary support and they can be called to resign (Woodhouse, 2004; Bäck et al., 2012; Dowding and Lewis, 2012; Fischer, 2012; Bovens et al., 2010).

In this chapter we juxtapose two different theoretical perspectives in exploring ministerial resignations and learning processes as a result of crisis accountability. The crisis accountability and particularly *blame management* literature provides insight into the use of particular framing contests and crisis narratives, and the *ministerial turnover* literature factors in structural and individual variables. Ministers are enabled as well as constrained by both structural and individual characteristics in positioning themselves with regard to accountability and learning hence we argue that both these perspectives play a crucial role in understanding ministerial resignations after crisis.

6.2 Two perspectives: Understanding ministerial resignations

Perspective 1: Blame management

Crisis events are potentially delegitimizing events to leaders ('t Hart, 1993). Governments and their top representatives are obvious blaming targets for perceived failures to predict, prevent or adequately prepare and cope with crisis events (Boin et al., 2010). When things go wrong office-holders employ blame management strategies to avoid being pinpointed as culpable and/or responsible for the problems that have been identified (McGraw, 1991; Sulitzeanu-Keenan and Hood, 2005; Hood, 2011). Public affairs research provides insight into how carefully crafted crisis communication strategies serve to *frame* (Sheufele, 1999) and influence audiences (Boin, 2009; Masters and 't Hart, 2012). Research into corporate responses to crisis events further underscores this (e.g., Hearit's *Crisis Management by Apology*). Coombs (2011) *impression management* and the notion of *political marketing* (Strömbäck, 2007) highlight the strategic use of communication to purposefully shape the reputation of, popularity of, and trust in institutions that can be capitalized during tough times (Boin et al., 2008; Boin, 2009). *Blame avoidance* accounts for the political and institutional factors that set the stage for interactions, communication and various blame management strategies that can be used by all types of actors in the public and political arena (Boin et al., 2008; Boin, 2009; Boin et al., 2010; Coombs, 2011; Hood, 2011).

The blaming tree conceptual model introduced in chapters 2 and 4 in more detail introduced three dimensions that would influence the choice of blaming strategies ministers follow. Depending on their perception of 1) how bad the situation is (severity) 2) what or who caused the problem; that is, depicting events as operational incidents or as symptoms of endemic problems (agency and causality) and 3) who should be held responsible; that is, depicting events as caused by a single actor or by 'many hands' (responsibility) (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003, Brändström et al., 2008; Boin, 2009). Political actors can resort to rhetorical strategies in order to escape blame and to deflect blame on others. In defense, their political opponents do the same. Once questions about causality are on the table, incumbents will be motivated to attribute adverse events to

incidents, ad-hoc and lower level causal factors, which they cannot be expected to know about and control. In turn, their political opponents and critics will frame the causes of the crisis in terms of much larger systemic failures, for which ministers can be held responsible. They will claim that the incumbents' past choices are the root causes; for example, regulatory frameworks, government cutbacks, organizational routines, and management cultures tolerant of rule violations (Bovens and 't Hart, 1996; Vaughan, 1999; Brändström et al., 2008). Likewise, Woodhouse (2004: 7) makes a distinction between "…'policy', which belongs to the minister, and 'operations', which are distanced from a minister and therefore lack a causal link".

We expect to find that *ministers are more likely to resign as a result of crisis-induced accountability pressures when accountability forums emphasize systemic/institutional rather than technical/operational causes for the crisis and its escalation.*

On responsibility, incumbent policymakers tend to attribute a negative event to a network failure: a complex interplay of structures, actors, and decisions. Network causality makes responsibility for failures a matter of the proverbial 'many hands' (Boin, 2009). Particularly with governments inheriting predecessors' policies and programs, it will be more difficult for political opponents to pin blame on one particular minister and call for his or her resignation. If causal accounts therefore emphasize the dispersed nature of the relevant governance processes, blame assignment will be complicated: pointing to the 'many' and therefore 'no one' being held responsible (Thompson, 1980) and decreasing the likelihood for immediate improvements or changes to take place. By contrast, pinning down the root of failure to individual policymakers will make it harder for incumbents to escape blame and necessitate scapegoating tactics (Ellis, 1994) and increase expectations of corrective measures to be taken. The firing of subordinates combined with pro-active adoption of corrective measures – symbolic as much as substantive – can sometimes relieve pressure on embattled ministers (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). Despite this, we expect to find that *ministers are more likely to resign as a result of crisis-induced accountability pressures when accountability forums emphasize the responsibility of one rather than several ministers and institutional actors.*

Perspective 2: Ministerial turnover

An alternative line of research focuses on the role of constitutional design, party structures and prime-ministerial discretion in determining how political actors are held accountable and sanctioned when they face accountability pressures (Dowding and Kang, 1998; Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Berlinski et al., 2007; Bovens et al., 2014a). At the core of this research is the idea of cabinets and ministers ultimately being accountable to citizens through the electoral process. Empirical studies in this vein, however, show that the perceived capability of a government and its individual members to govern properly depends on many

other (f)actors, with accountability taking many forms (Dowding and Lewis, 2012; Fischer, 2012). When a minister appears incapable of overseeing policy and of adequately informing the public and Parliament, then the Prime Minister, the party and the opposition might hold him or her accountable (Dowding and Dumont, 2009: 1). A successful minister therefore needs to possess both policy skills and political acumen to be able to maintain the cabinet's, party's, parliament's, the media's and the electorate's trust.

Findings from the UK suggest that there is a relationship between the age of a minister and the risk of forced resignations, where young and old ministers are most at risk (Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Berlinski et al., 2007). However, studies in the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany suggest that politically related characteristics seem to matter more to ministerial survival, such as previous parliamentary background and significant cabinet experience (Bäck et al., 2009b; 173–174; Fischer and Kaiser; 2009: 209; Bovens et al., 2010: 331). More experienced ministers have more "political credit" (Bovens et al., 2010) and are less likely to resign than political newcomers because of their understanding of how the (in-) formal procedures work and their broader political power base (Berlinski et al., 2007; Bäck et al., 2012: 5).

There are other calculations determining the relative "importance" of an individual minister to the Prime Minister. A minister who holds a "high" position within the party or is believed to be closer to the Prime Minister is likely to enjoy more protection (Dowding and MacLeay, 2011: 125). On the other hand, a minister with strong political support can also potentially be a leadership contender and thus a threat to the Prime Minister (Bäck et al., 2012). So if the minister in question already has a crisis in his/her portfolio, this might be an opportunity for the PM to set him/her back. The reputation and perceived performance of a minister can affect his or her likelihood to survive a resignation call (Hansen et al., 2013). Prior votes of no confidence are a factor that, according to several studies, leads to a higher resignation hazard (Berlinski et al., 2007; Dowding and Dumont, 2009). However, this finding is not supported in studies of Dutch ministers that show a surprisingly weak link between prior votes of no confidence and a higher risk of resignation (Bovens et al., 2010: 332). Notwithstanding these possible mixed motives and findings regarding the relative "importance" of ministers given their history of prior problems we expect to see that *ministers that have been subject to one or more prior calls of no confidence are more likely to resign than ministers who have not been subject to prior calls.*

However, the same study suggests that ministers are more important (and thus receive more protection) if they belong to a political party that is necessary for the parliamentary majority. Ministers who are not members of these necessary parties are more at risk to resign before the end of their term (Bovens et al., 2010: 330). We therefore expect to find that *ministers of political parties that are not a member of a necessary party for the parliamentary majority are more likely to resign than ministers who are members of a necessary party.*

The findings from the two theoretical perspectives and the propositions above can be summarized in a combined conceptual framework (see the figure below) and will be further operationalized in section 3.

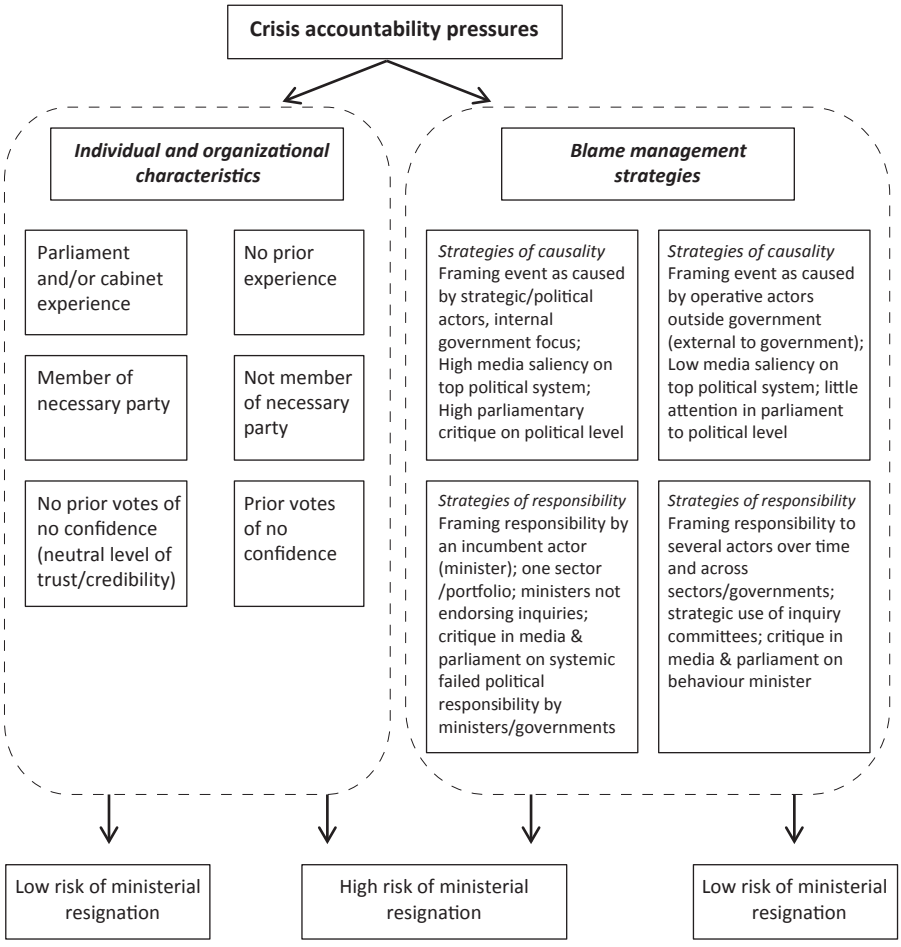

Figure 6.1: A combined conceptual framework – Blame management and Ministerial careers

6.3 Design, methods and data

We have primarily employed a comparative case study design of crisis events in the Netherlands that constituted situations of severe accountability pressures on the national government and incumbent ministers. A framework was derived from the existing findings of accountability and blame management literature that offer complementary perspectives on explaining the dependent variable in terms of ministerial resignations or not. The study design follows the logic of small to medium–N comparative analysis based on several empirical observations of each

case (George and Bennett, 2005; Blatter and Haverland, 2012:18–20). We have integrated comparative elements with case analysis to make it possible to identify similarities and differences among the cases which should facilitate comparisons and allow us to recognize patterns across cases (George and Bennett, 2005: 233). Each case was analyzed based on process-tracing method in order to understand how the dynamic interplay of blame management strategies developed and the results are summarized briefly in the text.[78] Four probable propositions derived from the findings in the literature on blame avoidance and ministerial careers were used to explore and probe against the evidence provided by the six crisis events that we included in the analysis. The cases were then compared based on the observations of each case in order to recognize patterns that seem to have had an effect on the outcome in terms of ministerial resignations.

In order to uncover if there is a link between the performance of blame management strategies, contextual individual characteristics and ministerial resignations we needed an empirical sample of cases that all constitute a potential "resignation issue" (crisis accountability) and also a significant variation in the outcome (resignation or non-resignation) is necessary to allow for a discussion on what factors seem to matter most for ministerial survival or resignations. Resignation issues are seen as issues "deemed serious enough for a call to be made for the minister to resign (or 'consider his position')" (Dewan and Dowding, 2005: 48). By accountability pressures we mean the rise in pressure when there is an accountability relationship requiring an actor to inform or justify his/her actions to an accountability "forum" such as members of parliament, organizations outside the parliament or the media, who's actions (critique) can have consequences for the actor (Dewan and Dowding, 2005: 47; Bovens et al., 2010).

We have chosen crisis cases based on availability of data and variation in both resignations and non-resignations. The criterion for a potential "resignation issue" was the result of prior research and a newspaper analysis. Therefore the crisis cases originate from different sectors, despite the potential difficulties. Different sectors are simply more politically "sensitive" than others, which is likely to influence the likelihood of resignations that we are not factoring in.
Cases were selected on the basis of the following five criteria:

1. Accountability pressures placed on minister by media and national debates.
2. Cases should have been identified as national crisis events through prior crisis-research;
3. Occurred within a contemporary era of politics (after 1990);
4. Well documented through databases and articles online;
5. Overall sample contains sufficient variation in the dependent variable (resignations or not)

78 Richer case analysis reports of each case can be obtained from the authors.

The cases involve resignation issues regarding political, administrative and 'natural' errors and can be grouped together as potential resignation "issues" due to a political incident or due to a breach of trust (Bovens et al., 2010).

Data mining has been done using four types of sources, leading to a triangulation of data sources: parliamentary documents (debates, hearings and reports of standing committees) on the official website of the Dutch parliament[79]; newspaper articles of three newspapers that discussed the minister and the crisis[80]; official reports of inquiry committees or (semi)-independent investigation committees after the incident[81]; background information of the minister from the 'Parlementair Documentatie Centrum'.[82]

In examining *blame management* we follow the *crisis exploitation* framework of Boin (2009) and apply two aspects of framing blame that can lead to accountability pressures on ministers: agency/causality and responsibility. *Agency and causality* are framed by actors either in terms of immediate causes involving references of failures by 'lower level operators or agencies' or referred to as larger system failures by 'top political actors' (Hood, 2011). *Responsibility* can either be framed to 'individual actors' or a complex 'network of (many) actors'. Although learning is difficult to identify through secondary sources (May, 1992), we have coded for proposed changes in policies, for example, when a minister refers to redefining policy instruments or changing the organization.

In operationalizing the expected findings from the ministerial career literature, we have built on the frameworks of Bovens et al. (2010) and Berlinski et al. (2007). First, we coded for previous ministerial experience as well as previous parliamentary experience. Secondly, we coded for previous votes of censure and necessary party for coalition government (meaning that if all ministers of one coalition party would resign due to the resignation of the individual minister, the cabinet would fall). All the information needed for coding the perspective of ministerial careers has been taken from information of the *Parlementair Documentatie Centrum* (parliamentary documentation center).[83] The center has a very complete database with biographical information about ministers and the establishment of cabinets.

After the coding process, all codes were registered in code registration forms to see how many codes were coded as present per variable.[84] Between 35 and 50 media accounts and parliamentary reports were examined per case to identify

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79 See zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl

80 All articles retrieved from the lexisnexis database, using similar search words in all cases (minister; name of crisis event; resignation; (head/name of) inquiry committee).

81 Fireworks: rapport commissie-Oosting; Banking; rapport commissie-de Wit; Bijlmer: rapport parlementaire enquêtecommissie; IRT: rapport commissie-van Traa; Schiphol: rapport onderzoeksraad voor veiligheid (OVV); Construction Fraud: rapport parlementaire enquêtecommissie.

82 www.parlement.com

83 This can be found online as www.parlement.com

84 The coding scheme as well as the case reports can be requested from the authors.

the variance in meaning-making strategies of actors and forums (incumbent ministers, media, parliament and political opposition).[85] Framing blame is a dynamic and interactive process where strategies adapt and change over time, and this fact needs to be acknowledged. In order to triangulate the findings of the study, the coding of observations was compared with two other sources of information: relevant policy documents and conclusions of prior crisis case studies (e.g., academic studies and official reports) which also provided information on other types of corrective measures being employed.

We have tried to reduce coincidental results by questioning the reproducibility of the results and if the results are accurate and generalizable (Yin, 2009). A second coding was performed to increase reliability; some of the data has been coded by a third researcher and compared to the results of the authors, which produced similar results as the original coding.[86]

6.4 Context and cases: Crisis management politics in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is not known for many 'ministerial crises'; most members of government resign collectively (and voluntarily) when the cabinet steps down. In the period examined for this study (1989 – 2010), seven cabinets held office[87] in which a total sum of 210 ministers took office. Of those 210 ministers, 16 were forced to resign due to a "breach of trust" and resigned close to the end of their cabinet tenure (Bovens et al., 2010: 323–324). The cabinets of Lubbers (1989–1994 [5],[88] one term) and Balkenende (2002–2010 [9], four terms)[89] seemed to face a higher number of forced resignations than the two 'Purple coalition'[90] cabinets in between. The period after incumbency of the first two Balkenende cabinets (2002–2003 [4], 2003–2006 [2]) sets the stage for a turbulent period regarding ministerial responsibility (Bovens et al., 2010; de Ruiter, 2013). The Dutch system of ministerial responsibility is subject to political judgment and the constitution does not entail set rules for interpretation of ministerial accountability. Table 6.1 briefly illustrates the six crisis events that have been included in the analysis of this study.

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85 All cases have a record of more than 100 coded segments.

86 The authors would like to thanks Minou de Ruiter for her help in this process. See de Ruiter (2013).

87 Lubbers 3, Kok 1, Kok 2, Balkende 1, Balkende 2, Balkende 3, Balkende 4.

88 The number in the brackets represents the number of forced resignations as been examined by Bovens et al (2010).

89 All of them were coalition cabinets. Lubbers III consisted of CDA/PVDA coalition (christian and social democrats). Kok cabinets consisted of social democrats, social liberals and conservative liberals. Balkenende differed over the years, centre-right government at first, then in later years governed together with social democrats again like Lubbers.

90 Purple coalition in the Netherlands means a mixture of social parties (traditionally red) and conservative parties (traditionally blue).

Table 6.1: Short descriptions of the six crisis cases analyzed for this study

Cabinet period	The non-resignations[1)]	Minister
Kok I and Kok II '94 – '02	A parliamentary inquiry of the Bijlmer disaster from 1992 unraveled in the period 1998–1999 more information about the (dangerous) cargo on board and the consequences for health. This led to a blame game between the minister(s) of Transport, the minister of Health and the Prime Minister.	Minister of Economic Affairs (before Transport, Public Works and Water Management) Annemarie Jorritsma
Kok II '98 – '02	After the Fireworks explosion in 2000, the government, municipality and fireworks factory became rolled up in a blame game on the responsibility of the disaster due to a report of the Oosting-committee. Following the report, a three-day debate takes places, leading to no resignations.	Minister of Internal Affairs Klaas de Vries; Minister of Housing, Urban Planning and Environment Jan Pronk; Minister of Defence Frank de Grave
Balkenende IV '07 – '10	The collapse of Lehman brothers (2008) led to a global banking crisis, and led to a series of measures taken by the minister of Finance in order to remain salience on the market. The decisions, concerning great amounts of taxpayers' money, were taken without informing the cabinet, leading to a parliamentary inquiry committee and public hearings of the minister involved.	Minister of Finance Wouter Bos
Cabinet period	**The resignations**	**Minister**
Lubbers III '89 – '94 (caretaking)	The IRT affair unraveled the controversial methods in tracing down criminal (drugs) networks in 1993/1994. Before a parliamentary inquiry started, two ministers resigned due to internal conflicts and heated debates on May 27 1994.	Minister of Justice Ernst Hirsch Ballin; Minister of Internal Affairs Ed van Thijn.
Balkenende I '02 – '03 (caretaking)	A TV airing of the Dutch journalism program Zembla on construction fraud[2)] in 2001 revealed an extensive 'black market' between construction companies. It turned out during public hearings that the incumbent minister had been informed of these arrangements between construction companies and the building of the Schiphol Tunnel, oppositely of what he had admitted before.	Minister of Defence (before Justice) Benk Korthals
Balkenende III '06 – '07 (caretaking)	In 2005, a fire in the Schiphol detention complex (leaving 11 dead) uncovered major failures in fire safety regulation, leading to a blame game on ministerial level for a lack of supervision and regulation after the report of the Dutch Safety Board is published. The report clearly attributes governmental failure of the State building agency and the penitentiaries service.	Minister of Justice Piet Hein Donner; Minister of Housing, Urban Planning and Environment Sybilla Dekker; Portfolio minister of Immigration and Integration Rita Verdonk (non-resignation)

[1)] Descriptions are made by the author, information retrieved from www.parlement.com

[2)] See http://zembla.incontxt.nl/seizoenen/2001/afleveringen/09-11-2001

6.5 Patterns of ministerial resignations in the Netherlands

Perspective 1: Blame management[91]

Causality

Table 6.2: Results on causality

Blame management strategies on causality					
Case	Minister frame causality to lower level actors	Media frame causality to system/high level actors	Minister frames causality as previous mismanagement of predecessors	Parliament frame causality by top political actors/system	Outcome
FW de Vries	A	A	A	P	N-R
FW Pronk	A	P	P	P	N-R
FW de Grave	P	P	A	P	N-R
Banking Bos	A	A	A	P	N-R
Bijlmer Jorritsma	A	A	A	P	N-R
IRT van Thijn	A	P	P	P	R
IRT Hirsch Ballin	P	P	A	A/P	R
Schiphol Donner	A	P	A/P	P	R
Schiphol Dekker	A	A/P	A	A/P	R
Schiphol Verdonk	P	P/A	A	P/A	N-R
CF Korthals	P	A	A	P	R

A = Absent. P = Present. If result is shown as A/P or P/A this means that the strategy changed over time. R = Resignation. N = No resignation.

Framing causality by those that remain seated

In the non-resignation cases there seems to be a pattern in how accountability forums and ministers address causality in the event (see table 6.2). Most ministers (except for de Grave) did not blame their lower level operatives for causing the negative events or its escalation. Good relations with their public officials (agencies) were pointed out in most cases, focusing in the debate(s) on the issue on the minister-parliament level (political), or dispersed causality and for example referred to 'trans boundary' forces that caused the. Bos, for example, states that the ministry of Finance did not see it coming: '…we were not aware that we would need these instruments on short notice'.[92] De Grave (Fireworks) does blame his public officials claiming that they did not inform him about the existence of the responsible governmental agency for fireworks regulation: 'The marginal existence (of fireworks regulation) within the department, explains why

91 All quotes have been translated by the author.

92 Public hearing parliamentary inquiry committee 05-12-2011, p.2.

no action was taken any time sooner'.[93] It is noteworthy that except Pronk and de Grave, the media is not persistent in framing causality to high-level actors. They merely take over the main highlights of the public debates but hardly criticize them publicly. Only Pronk argues from an institutional/mismanagement perspective, noting that he 'was surprised after coming to office about the way that the supervisors worked'[94] and that the 'execution of external safety policies had been an issue already when he came to office in 1998'.[95] Members of parliament framed causality by top political actors, with the main argument that they were misinformed and therefore the minister created more uncertainty. In the Bijlmer disaster, a cargo bill debate in parliament was not about the actual meaning of the bills, but about the fact that the minister misinformed the parliament about the completeness of the documents that she presented and therefore further institutionalized the crisis: 'the minister of Transport … should be charged … because we are talking about crucial information here'[96] or 'Jorritsma has misinformed the Parliament as a Minister of Transport'.[97]

Framing causality by those that resigned

In the resignation cases, a majority of ministers framed causality due to actions by lower level operatives or attributed blame to lower level operatives or criticasters in the media. This was not the case in the Schiphol fire, where Donner and Dekker accepted their blame immediately after the report was published and resigned. Donner made one reference to the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency when he resigned, limiting his own involvement by claiming that previous cabinets took most of the decisions regarding fire safety.[98] In the phase directly after the incident, they made little reference to their role in causing the crises, as well as little references to the role of their public officials. In the IRT case, high media and parliamentary saliency showed extensive critique on the role of the political system in causing the crisis.[99] Korthals suffered merely from his position as scapegoat for previous cabinet failure.

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93 NRC Handelsblad, April 26, 2001, *'Slachtoffers Enschede vergoeden' ; Eis Kamermeerderheid.*
* Van Thijn became minister after the death of minister Ien Dales during the IRT affair. Therefore, he was responsible for judging his own acts as acting head of the Amsterdam city council – head of the police force.
** Due to previous role as corps director at Amsterdam police force.

94 de Volkskrant, January 17, 2001, 'Inspecties kwamen zelf amper buiten'.

95 NRC Handelsblad, April 26, 2001, *'Slachtoffers Enschede vergoeden' ; Eis Kamermeerderheid.*

96 Kamerstuk TK 26 241, nr. 82 4727–4782.

97 NRC Handelsblad, April 23, 1999, 'Ministers zouden de eer aan zichzelf moeten houden'.

98 Minister statement 21-09-2006 www.rijksbegroting.nl/2006/kamerstukken,2006/9/21/han8039a07.html

99 See for example Kamerstukken, TK 74-5233 (25-05-1994), NRC Handelsblad, March 25, 1994, *'Nog niemand geofferd in Holland zuiveringsritueel'* .

To conclude, the results in the non-resignation cases show that accountability forums frame causality mainly on narrow and detailed aspects of the crisis, focusing on a lack of information given by the minister or the timing in which he/she presented information to the public. In the Bijlmer case and the fireworks case,[100] causality was (also) dispersed to a wider circle of actors, involving factory owners and Air cargo transport organizations. Little extensive critique on the institutional efficacy was identified in three non-resignation cases. In the resignation cases on the contrary, especially in the IRT and Schiphol case, causes were frequently framed in debates and media as primarily a governmental failure indicative of systemic/institutional flaws.

Responsibility dimension

Table 6.3: Results on responsibility

Blame management strategies on responsibility						
Cases	Minister accepts responsibility	Minister disperse responsibility	Parliament critique on minister (gov/opp)	Resignation calls by pol opposition in media	Media critique on minister	Outcome
FW de Vries	P	P	A	A	A	N-R
FW Pronk	P	P	P	A	P	N-R
FW de Grave	P	P	P	A	P	N-R
Banking Bos	P	P	A	A	A	N-R
Bijlmer Jorritsma	A	P	P	A	P	N-R
IRT van Thijn	P	P/A	P	P	P	R
IRT Hirsch Ballin	A/P	P	P	P	P	R
Schiphol Donner	P	A	A	A	A	R
Schiphol Dekker	P	A	A	A	A/P	R
Schiphol Verdonk	A	A	P	P/A	P	N-R
CF Korthals	A/P	P	P	A	A/P	R

A = Absent. P = Present. If result is shown as A/P or P/A this means that the strategy changed over time. R = Resignation. N = No resignation.

Framing responsibility by those that remain seated

Officially, all ministers in the non-resignation cases accepted responsibility for what they were being blamed for and some interesting patterns can be discerned (see table 6.3). First, a majority of the ministers were promoting the idea of 'collective or shared' responsibility. If one is to blame, then you might as well blame all.

100 In the Fireworks case, the focus was not on misinforming parliament, but blame was widespread over a great amount of actors, leaving 'no one to blame'.

Especially minister de Vries and minister Jorritsma used this line of argument on several occasions: 'We were just the coordinator'[101] (Jorritsma) or 'I'm just the coordinator in these kinds of cases'[102] (De Vries).

In the fireworks case, the three ministers warned that if they would face a vote of censure, the entire cabinet would have to resign, which was discarded by the opposition in the media.[103] Secondly, the ministers accepted responsibility only for the situations that were clearly linked to their (policy) part of the incident. Pronk: 'I can only look at this from an environmental perspective … that is my competence'.[104] Thirdly, ministers were keen to disperse responsibility to colleagues or other third parties. Minister of Finance Bos, was seen as a decisive leader in both media and parliamentary debates by using the argument 'urgent and transboundary' to justify his actions, leaving him no choice than to act quickly and be decisive. It later became apparent that decisions regarding spending more than 400M of taxpayers' money to save banks had not been communicated with parliament, which rendered him critique from media and his counterparts. A fourth pattern regarding how responsibility was framed in non-resignation cases is that several ministers used the line of "memory loss" reasoning in facing questions and critique. During public hearings, Jorritsma and Bos state more than once that they could not recall talking to their colleagues about case X or situation Y. Jorritsma: 'I think I did so myself, but I cannot recall this for a full one hundred percent'.[105] De Grave used a similar strategy, by noting that he was not aware of the existence of one of the governmental agencies that fell under his responsibility, therefore he could not be held responsible for their behavior. In the resignations cases, Korthals applied similar strategies as Jorritsma, Bos and de Grave, by using an 'I-didn't-know' line of reasoning to justify his actions. In his case, Korthals was questioned by the inquiry committee right after public prosecutor Wijkerslooth stated that he had informed the minister about the upcoming deal between the public prosecution service and the construction agencies (albeit informal).[106] Because the information was made public, this led to a direct blame game where the minister was accused of misinforming parliament for the third time as a minister.

Fifth, parliamentary critique was divided and shows no clear pattern in the non-resignation cases, critique on ministers was mainly implicit and little clear-cut calls for resignations. In all three cases, the parliamentary critique was

101 Public Hearing 12-03-1999.
102 Kamerstukken TK 27157, nr 72-4750.
103 Telegraaf, April 27, 2001, *'Op valreep kamerdebat vuurwerkramp: De Grave overleeft motie van wantrouwen.*
104 Kamerstuk TK 27157, nr 72-4768.
105 Public Hearing 12-03-1999.
106 Kamerstukken II 2002–2003 (16-09-2002), 28 244, nr. 7; 1208.

implicit with spokespersons making sweeping judgements that 'the minister should reconsider if they feel like they have enough authority to remain seated',[107] both in the media as in the parliament itself. For example in de Bijlmer case, Groenlinks (Green party) spokesperson Rosenmöller states that 'there have been so many mistakes claiming ministerial responsibility, but it is difficult to address this to one minister'.[108] Or in the Fireworks case, where Groenlinks spokesperson van Steenhoven said that "I can imagine that a minister is affected in a way that he takes responsibility and resigns as a consequence of that".[109] Furthermore, there seems to have been few direct resignation calls made in media in the non-resignation cases. Although not completely absent, most of the calls made were indirect. For example that 'politicians have left office for less',[110] that 'the report held no political consequences'[111] or that 'they should question if they should resign now that the public trust has been harmed'.[112]

Proposed changes in non-resignation cases is primarily visible at the "social" level. In the Fireworks as well as the Bijlmer case, lots of references are made to improving the "way of working", but no evidence was found that showed changes were actually made to procedures. In the banking crisis case, a new regulatory framework was introduced which indicates learning taking place on a policy level in this particular case.

Framing responsibility by those that resigned

In the resignation cases, we can see that the Schiphol fire was quite an outstanding case compared to the other two (IRT and construction fraud). Two of the three ministers resigned after the report of the Safety Board[113] was published[114] a year after the incident and left the aftermath debate to their follow-ups.[115] They seemed to follow the logic of the 'Carrington-doctrine' by taking responsibility although not admitting to have done anything wrong: 'causes of the incident are due to

107 See for example: Telegraaf, April 25, 2001, *'Ministers op matje in debat Enschede'.*

108 Kamerstuk TK, 26 241, nr. 82 4727-4782.

109 Kamerstuk TK 27 157, nr. 72 4753.

110 Volkskrant, April 24, 2001, '*Vol regeringsvak in Enschede-debat'.*

111 NRC Handelsblad, June 3, 1999, 'Enquete over Bijlmerramp eindigt in grote deceptie ; Tweede Kamer negeert politiek gevoelige conclusies van enquetecommissie over afwikkeling van El Al crash'.

112 Telegraaf, April 25, 2001, *'Ministers op matje in debat Enschede'.*

113 The Dutch Safety Board is an independent research board that aims to improve safety in the Netherlands. The board was installed in February 2005, eight months prior to the Schiphol fire.

114 The report was published here: http://www.onderzoeksraad.nl/uploads/items-docs/13/rapport_schipholbrand.pdf

115 Previous minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin and previous minister of Environment Pieter Winsemius (both of them survived the accountability debate about the report).

their public services, but it is time to show the consequences'.[116] The media and members of parliament appreciated their resignations which was not debated and paved the way for lesson drawing instead of political debacle on whether or not the ministers should or should not resign. In the case of Donner, he 'bought' political credit by resigning and returned after elections as minister of Social Affairs in the new cabinet three months later. Minister Dekker, who resigned at the same time as Donner, did not face harsh critique in the media or in parliament. Based on the conclusions of the Dutch Safety Board, it was evident that by resignation of Donner, Dekker was forced to resign as well. The findings in the Schiphol case are contradictory to findings in all other cases, and even more in contrast to the non-resignation of minister Verdonk. This can possibly be explained by the influence of the Safety Board report, which presented conclusions that pointed directly at public offices under the responsibility of the ministry of Justice and the ministry of Housing. In the report, the role and responsibility of minister Verdonk was left out and responsibility was attributed to those in charge of fire safety of penitentiary complexes. In the IRT case, a breach of trust between the two ministers became disastrous. They couldn't act as a team any longer, which led to extensive critique in parliament requesting a resignation.[117]

The expectation that when responsibility is dispersed among many actors (ministers) there is less risk of individual resignations seems valid for both non-resignation as resignation cases. Therefore, there is no clear pattern to show that disperse responsibility contributes to less resignations. In two of the three resignation cases, responsibility was dispersed among several ministers. Even in the case where 'formally' only minister Korthals was put under severe accountability pressure, the minister tries to disperse blame towards Minister Netelenbos (Minister of Transport), since she was the minister responsible for the railway agency.[118] What is interesting to see here is that accountability pressures can change over *time*. For example in the Schiphol case, where it seems at first that responsibility is distributed amongst Donner and Verdonk, but when the report of the Safety Board is published, accountability pressure shifted to minister Dekker.

In both the IRT and the construction fraud case, we indicated in the data that extensive policy changes took place like reviews of legislation and changes to regulatory agencies. Resignations in these studies could have paved the way for more substantial revision of policies and learning on the policy level.

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116 Minister statement 21-09-2006 www.rijksbegroting.nl/2006/kamerstukken,2006/9/21/han8039a07.html

117 Trouw, May 28, 1994, '*Chaos en verziekte sfeer braken ministers en IRT op'.*

118 Kamerstuk TK 28244, nr. 7, 1219.

Perspective 2: Ministerial careers

Table 6.4: Results on ministerial careers

Cabinet and individual characteristics of ministers (N=10)					
Cases	Previous ministerial experience	Previous parliamentary experience	Necessary party for coalition	Earlier votes of censure	Outcome
FW de Vries	P	P	P	A	N-R
FW Pronk	P+	P	P	A	N-R
FW de Grave	P	P	P	A	N-R
Banking Bos	P	P	P	A	N-R
Bijlmer Jorritsma	P	P	P	A	N-R
IRT van Thijn	P	P	P	A	R
IRT Hirsch Ballin	A	A	P	A	R
Schiphol Donner	P	A	A/P	P	R
Schiphol Dekker	A	A	A/P	A	R
Schiphol Verdonk	A	A	A/P	A/P (another during incident)	N-R
CF Korthals	P	P	P	A/P (two during incident)	R

A = Absent. P = Present. If result is shown as A/P or P/A this means that the strategy changed over time. R = Resignation. N = No resignation.

Cabinet experience

Eleven ministers were examined in total, five of them in non-resignation cases and six in resignation cases. As for the expectation that earlier cabinet experience leads to a lower resignation hazard, the results show a pattern. In the non-resignation cases all of the ministers had previous experience in the cabinet. Together, they had more experience than those in the three resignation cases. Minister Pronk (fireworks crisis) already served three terms (total of 16,5 years), and his fellow ministers in the fireworks crisis both served two years prior to the crisis accountability discussion at different ministries. Minister Bos (banking crisis) served as a Secretary of State at the Ministry of Finance before holding the position of a minister there. Jorritsma (Bijlmer) is the only minister who had no prior cabinet experience before coming into office as Minister of Transport and Water, but during the accountability pressure period she was already holding a new portfolio (Economic Affairs).

In the resignation cases, most ministers held accountable had no, or very limited prior experience as cabinet ministers. In the IRT affair, minister Ballin was about to finish his term when he was forced to resign. Two ministers, van Thijn (IRT) and Donner (Schipol) had prior experience (albeit relatively little) as cabinet ministers (van Thijn one year and Donner 9 months) before. Van Thijn was not even in for half a year when he had to resign. Minister Dekker and minister Verdonk (Schiphol) lacked previous experience as a cabinet minister as well as parliamentary experience. Minister Korthals was the only minister who had served a full term and had parliamentary experience before resigning in the construction fraud case.

Supportive of the intuitive knowledge and some prior research findings is that ministers seem to more easily accept resignations after having left (or is about to leave) the formal ministerial position (in a care-taker government, prior to elections or new position). In all three resignation cases, there are ministers (Korthals, Ballin, van Thijn) who resign prior to, or shortly after new elections. The ministers Donner and Dekker resign while they are part of a transitional government. Resignations are in these situations more of a symbolic/political gesture and the result of political calculations to quietly phase out a minister who has no future in government. The two resigned two months prior to new elections, after the Social Liberals withdrew from the government in June 2006. Although slightly ambiguous, we believe that the results are congruent with the findings of Bovens *et al* (2010) that earlier cabinet experience seems to decrease resignation hazards.

Parliamentary experience

The expectation that previous parliamentary experience leads to a lower risk of being forced to resign shows a clear pattern in these cases. Three out of five ministers in the resignation category had no prior experience before being appointed a cabinet minister. In all non-resignation cases, the ministers all had prior experience in Parliament before entering their positions in cabinet. This supports the findings in earlier studies of ministerial tenure that previous parliamentary experience helps to increase the chances of staying in office.

Necessary party for coalition and earlier votes of no confidence

Almost all cases show the same negative result regarding the relative (un-) importance of the party to which the minister belongs to. All ministers examined were members of a party that was necessary for the coalition (to maintain the majority in parliament). In the Schiphol case, the cabinet changed due to the collective resignation of coalition member D66 (Social Liberals) just before both accountable ministers resigned (by that time they were thus members of

a minority government). Of all ministers examined for this study, Donner, Verdonk and Korthals had previous experience of being subjected to votes of no confidence. Minister Donner already had three votes of no confidence before resigning over Schiphol, and Korthals had two during the accountability process of the construction fraud crisis. However, this is not sufficient to show a pattern for what we expected to find.

Overall, we can conclude that previous ministerial experience and parliamentary experience do influence the chances for survival of individual ministers. This is in line with prior findings on forced resignations (Berlinski et al.,2007; Bovens et al., 2010). The proposition that ministers would increase their chances of survival by being a member of a party necessary for the coalition or that prior votes of no confidence would increase the hazard of resignations cannot be validated since there is not enough variation in the empirical material to identify any patterns.

6.6 Concluding discussion

The aim of this chapter was to explore why cabinet ministers in some cases resign due to crisis accountability pressures whereas in other events, with the similar kind of pressure, they do not. We have argued that these different outcomes, and the choices made leading to resignations or non-resignations in themselves could be recognized as a kind of (at least) political learning. Furthermore, we tried to identify to what extent other corrective measures were present corresponding with resignations, where the pressures on ministerial turnover becomes an important contextualizing factor that constrain or enable other types of institutional learning processes. We can see that policy change or reform do occasionally take place in these situations, indicating that learning is indeed not always hindered by the high politics of post-crisis accountability pressures. We believe that the distinction between the logics of political, social and policy learning (May, 1992) is useful for discussing learning in relation to ministerial resignations and we see a slight pattern towards more substantial policy learning when ministers have resigned contrary to when they remained seated. This can have multiple causes. First, of more general importance, once a minister has left it is logical that focus is allowed to shift towards a more substantial discussion on causes and flaws rather than prolonged focus on debating ministerial accountability. Secondly, and more case specific, the Netherlands are not known for many resignations, the logic being that when they do, it is a signal calling for substantial and more deep-rooted change. In the table below, we summarized the findings within the framework applied here in keywords and attempts to link the outcomes of ministerial resignations to indications of different levels of learning.

Table 6.5: Effects of accountability pressures on ministerial careers and governing institutions

Case	(Individual) Political effects	Main strategies by minister(s)	Effects on policies/ institutions	Levels of learning
Fireworks	Non-resignation, damage to reputation of minister after vote of no confidence by political opposition	Collective responsibility promoted, strategic use of installment of inquiry committee, shifting blame to external actors	Advocating cultural changes in organization, proposed extensive policy reforms	Social – incremental policy learning (reorganization)
Banking crisis decisions	Non-resignation, no individual damage but no return in new cabinet after end of term	Too big and urgent to fail, transboundary causes and effects and external origin, positive focus on civil servants (experts)	Advocating stronger (external) EU regulatory powers, increasing transboundary cooperation	Policy – new regulatory framework National Bank
Bijlmer cargo flight	Non-resignation, continued support and new ministerial post	Shifting blame to external actors, disperse responsibility among several actors, undermine conclusions of inquiry committee	Proposed change in relations and cooperation structure between ministry and State aviation service – cultural change	Social – changes in organizational structures and culture
IRT	Resignation, one of the ministers makes come back in multiple governments	'Picking a fight between each other', difficulties in dual roles, multiple actor	Extensive review of investigation services, legislative changes	Policy – organizational structure changed, legislation changed
Schiphol fire	Resignation, one of the ministers makes come back in new cabinets	Framing resignation as success, cooperative with inquiry committee but do not accept findings, 'verdict too harsh'	Dutch Safety Board increased legitimacy, strengthening of regulatory organizations	Policy/social – intensified regulation in coming years, attention to safety increased
Construction fraud	Resignation while already having a new portfolio in a new cabinet	I-didn't-know, disperse responsibility to other minister, difficult role conflict Public Prosecution Service-ministry	Review of cooperation Public Prosecution Service – ministry of Justice	Social learning – small (cosmetic) changes in administration

Regarding the expectations on the employment of blame management strategies as an important factor to ministerial careers after crisis, we suggest that based on our findings, ministers are more likely to resign if the dominant narrative is that the crisis was caused by systemic rather than technical flaws. In the IRT case as well as the Schiphol case, blame was by accountability forums explicitly appointed to failure caused by systemic/institutional errors. The construction fraud case was more exceptional since it was not directly appointed to a governmental institution at first, but the actions of the public prosecution office and the results of the examination of the parliamentary committee led to resignation of the responsible minister. On the contrary, in the non-resignation cases, the accountability forums mainly emphasized causality of the crisis as 'out-of-scope of ownership'.

As for the expectation regarding dispersing responsibility, we have seen that in four out of six cases responsibility was attributed to several actors (also dispersed over time) rather than focused on one minister. This observation was present for both non-resignations as resignations. This could be strategic foresight; long time before investigation committees present their conclusions, or resignation of cabinet in the meantime, but this has not been systematically analyzed.

Regarding expectations based on individual and cabinet characteristics and their relevance to ministerial survival after crisis, we cannot conclude any clear patterns in any of the cases (resignations or not). Earlier votes of no confidence were not obviously different in the resignation or non-resignation events. Neither does it seem to be an important factor for ministerial survival rates if ministers under pressure were members of a necessary party for the coalition or not. The most significant observation that seems to have had a real impact upon the future career of Dutch ministers in cabinet was if the minister in question had previous experience in cabinet and parliament or not. This is a link that needs to be further substantiated in a larger sample of ministerial resignations.

At the outset of this chapter we outlined that the kind of learning that is generally expected to occur after crisis is fairly short sighted, highly politicized and generally with an aim to overcome and survive the most acute phases of crisis and its aftermath. Given that perspective, career management is a strategy to respond to crisis accountability pressures as well as a consequence. As a tactical, political instrument, resignations are powerful symbolic tools for leaders to step out of a negative situation going worse and to reappear in another shape and position further ahead. We argue that this type of political learning is benefited from crisis events where stakes are high and ministerial performance and ability to shape the narratives are crucial to their survival and a potential for advancement.

The results of this study could potentially contribute to the research agendas of both post crisis accountability studies, learning and ministerial tenure studies by pointing at some factors to be further explored. First, learning in the sense of deeper, more sustainable change seem more likely to occur after a crisis when an exogenous accountability forum places significant pressure on incumbent decision-makers to initiate such steps. Our analysis gave some support to this proposition and at the same time it seems that especially after incidents that are framed as caused primarily by governmental/systemic flaws, attempts at policy learning are still likely to occur. We can with caution suggest that promoting institutional and policy learning initiatives should be more successful when the dominant perception is that systemic flaws rather than technical failures caused a failure, irrespectively of the exogenous pressures placed on decision-makers. This is also in line with expectations of prior research (Boin, 2009). Secondly, we have observed a growing role of (visual) medialization of incidents, for example in the construction fraud case (parliamentary inquiry committee for the construction fraud incident started after broadcast of the TV-show Zembla) as well as the Schiphol case (the report of the Safety Board came with a video to support the

findings of the report). The role of medialization of incidents is a well-known factor and is likely to increase and take on new forms as the technology continues to evolve. We further believe it would be useful to rethink resignations as failures considering the variation in political context and the kind of political learning that they foster. In a 'stick-to-your-seat' democracy as the Netherlands, resignations can work refreshingly or can 'buy' an officeholder political credit for a future career. The findings here are not particularly similar to comparative studies of other governing systems. Lastly, (electoral) timing would be an interesting perspective to examine in the broader ministerial turnover perspective, since we have seen that most ministers that resign do so prior to upcoming elections or when the 'time has come to do so'.

Chapter 7: Crisis, accountability, blame management and ministerial careers: Sweden[119]

Annika Brändström

7.1 Introduction

Crisis events are situations when governments face serious threats to key societal values or structures, and at the same time need to maintain or restore public trust in public institutions and leaders associated with the management of these threats. Part of the public leadership challenge includes the ability to face public pressure and to be able to openly assess, explain and account for the unfolding crisis events through meaning-making activities (Boin et al., 2005) as well as contain or avoid an escalation of accountability pressures (Boin et al., 2008; Masters and t'Hart, 2012). The political crisis communication and blame management that they elicit can have profound effects on the careers of top political actors (Boin et al., 2010; Coombs, 2011; Hood, 2011). The key puzzle in this article is why some ministers survive crises for which they are being blamed, whereas others fail. In parliamentary systems, the task of political crisis management is vested in the work of the Cabinet, where individual ministers are responsible for reporting to the head of government and to the parliament on their performance (Dowding and Dumont, 2009; Dowding and Lewis, 2012). During crisis episodes, there is often tremendous external pressure demanding solutions and accountability as well as pressure from within one's party and from cabinet colleagues. *Accountability pressures* arise when there is an accountability

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relationship requiring an actor (for example an individual official) to explain or justify his/her actions to an accountability "forum" such as members of parliament, organizations outside the parliament and the media, who's actions (critique) can have consequences to the actor (Dewan and Dowding, 2005: 47; Bovens, 2010). Managing accountability relationships requires actors to actively formulate strategies to frame, communicate about and defend their performance in situations that forums inquire about (Boin, 2009; Hood, 2011; Stark, 2011; Masters and t'Hart, 2012).

Furthermore, support for a minister can quickly be lost when indications appear that he or she has started to become 'tainted' (Woodhouse, 2004). Internal political power brokers may become nervous and opportunistic once external actors knock on the door and increase the pressure. A Prime Minister possesses both formal and informal means of reshuffling ministers but has several considerations to make before exerting sanctions; coalition considerations, party factions and overall government popularity (Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Bäck, et al. 2012). Resignations can be understood as the ex-post sanction of ministers that have failed their constitutional *responsibilities* or *role,* over resignation *issues* and by resignation *calls* (Woodhouse, 2004; Dowding and Dumont, 2009). Recent studies of ministerial careers in European countries, including Sweden, indicate that ministers resign when they are forced to and not because of formal constitutional accountability mechanisms (Bäck et al. 2012; Fischer, 2012; Svedin, 2012). Factors both inside and outside the Cabinet, such as accountability pressures from external arenas and understanding of the context of specific resignations need to be examined (Fischer, 2012; Hansen et al., 2013).

In Sweden, the relationship between ministerial resignations and crisis accountability as a resignation event has not been explored with the exception of a few studies focusing explicitly on political scandals (Allern and Pollack, 2012; Bromander, 2012) generally on crisis management (Sundelius et al., 1997) or ministerial turnover (see Bäck et al., 2009a,b; Hansen et al., 2013). However, Swedish ministers have not been spared from national crisis events, or from premature resignations. The aim here is to apply two different perspectives drawn from the literature to understand ministerial resignations: ministerial tenure as a consequence of blame management strategies and ministerial tenure as a result of contextual cabinet and individual factors. Findings from prior studies in these two fields are employed in a comparative analysis of 10 national crisis accountability events. I expect that these two distinct perspectives derived from different traditions are complementary and will enrich the understanding of crisis accountability effects on ministerial tenure.

7.2 Understanding crisis-induced ministerial resignations

The blame management perspective

Governments and their top representatives are obvious targets for blame for perceived failures to predict, prevent or adequately prepare and cope with crisis events. When things go wrong, office-holders employ blame management strategies to avoid being pinpointed as culpable and/or responsible for the problems identified (McGraw 1991; Boin et al., 2008; Boin et al., 2010). Public affairs research provides insight into how carefully crafted crisis communication strategies serve to *frame* and influence audiences (Scheufele, 1999). Shanahan, Jones et al. (2011) identifies how *policy narratives* casting heroes, villains and victims and widely disseminated through for instance real-time media outlets can influence policy change. Research into corporate responses to crisis events further underscores this, e.g., Hearit's (2006) *Crisis Management by Apology*. Despite the multiplicity of related concepts (e.g. political scandals, policy fiascos etc.) from the point of view of those having to 'manage' them, they become 'crisis like' events: threat, high pace (time pressure) and uncertainty about the course of the 'framing contest' they find themselves in and need to respond to (Boin et al., 2005). A distinction can also be made between situational (exogenous triggers such as natural disasters) and institutional (endogenous triggers: preventable policy failures/breakdowns) crises (Boin et al., 2008). Coombs (2011) *impression management* and the notion of *political marketing* (Lees-Marshment et al., 2010) highlight the strategic use of communication to purposefully shape the reputation of, and trust in institutions that can be capitalized during tough times (Boin et al., 2008; Boin et al., 2010; Nord and Ohlsson, 2013). *Blame avoidance* accounts for the political and institutional factors that set the stage for these interactions, communications and various blame strategies in the public and political arena (Bovens et al., 1999; Boin et al. 2008; Coombs, 2011; Hood, 2011). Scholars broadly identify three types of actors' strategies for avoiding blame in view of such instances; *agency strategies* that limit formal responsibility through predetermined delegation structures; *policy strategies* that obscure the causal relation between the officeholder and outcome of his or her decisions; and *presentational strategies* which is essentially meaning-making by framing events and manipulating public and media perceptions (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003; Hood, 2011; Shanahan et al., 2011; Masters and 't Hart, 2012). Here, the focus is on presentational strategies of ministers who face accountability pressures related to their performance in triggering or responding to a crisis.

Past research suggests that the presentational strategies ministers follow will depend on their perception of 1) how bad the situation is (severity) 2) what or who caused the problem; depicting events as operational incidents or as symptoms of endemic problems (agency and causality) and 3) who should be held responsible; that is, depicting events as caused by a single actor or by 'many hands'

(responsibility) (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). Political actors can resort to rhetorical strategies to escape blame and to deflect blame onto others. In defense, their political opponents do the same. Once questions about causality are on the table, incumbents will be motivated to attribute adverse events to incidents, ad-hoc and lower level causal factors. Pushing blame down to operators and first-line managers and away from top-level policy makers, as they can now claim that they cannot be expected to know, let alone influence, things at the local and detailed level. In turn, media and political opponents will claim that there is more to an incident than technical failure, for example when there is a trail of warnings and concerns raised about risks, vulnerabilities and practices. Then the issue floats (at least retrospectively) more in orbit of system-level policymakers, as clearly there are underlying issues and root causes of risk distribution, maintenance, unsafe practices, government cut-backs and management cultures (Vaughan, 1999; Brändström et al., 2008) for which a minister can be held accountable. In such situations that are exclusively understood as situational crises (caused by outside exogenous triggers), blame levels on top political leaders are likely to be low whereas in institutional crises (endogenous triggers) blame is likely to be more intense and flow higher up the hierarchy (Boin et al., 2010) Likewise, Woodhouse (2004:7) makes a distinction between "…'policy', which belongs to the minister, and 'operations', which are distanced from a minister and therefore lack a causal link". With this in mind I expect that *ministers are more likely to resign as a result of crisis-induced accountability pressures when accountability forums emphasize systemic/institutional rather than technical/operational causes for the crisis and its escalation.*

On responsibility, incumbent policymakers tend to attribute the incident to a network failure: frame the situation at hand as a result of a complex interplay of structures, actors, and decisions that over time and with the consent of a broad spectrum of top policymakers which has left few options to deviate from the collective path. Particularly with governments inheriting one another's policies and programs, it will be difficult for media and political opponents to clearly pin blame on one particular minister: pointing to 'many' and therefore 'no one' being held responsible (Thompson, 1980; Boin et al., 2008). By contrast, media and political opponents will try to uncover specific "bad" decisions, failed communication and mishandling of mandate or regulations to pin down the failure to individual policymakers. Incumbents will have a harder time escaping blame and will be forced to respond to questions and propositions about their involvement, triggering defensive routines (Jones, 2000). Embattled ministers can resort to firing subordinates combined with pro-active adoption of corrective measures – symbolic as much as substantive – which sometimes relieve pressure (Brändström et al., 2003). However, it can be expected that *ministers are more likely to resign as a result of crisis-induced accountability pressures, when accountability forums emphasize the responsibility of one rather than several ministers and institutional actors.*

The ministerial careers perspective

Another line of research focuses on the role of constitutional design, party structures and prime-ministerial discretion in determining how ministers are held accountable and sanctioned (see Dowding and Kang, 1998; Woodhouse, 2004; Berlinski et al., 2007; Bovens, et al., 2014). At the core of this research is the idea of cabinets and ministers ultimately being accountable through the electoral process. But, there are several common reasons why ministers step down: "natural", such as personal reasons, illness, and advanced age (Dowding and Dumont, 2009; Fisher and Kaiser, 2009:32; Hansen et al., 2013) or due to "ministerial drift" (Indridadson and Kam, 2008). Dowding et al., (2012) define a *forced resignation* as a resignation with the purpose of mitigating the consequences of personal errors, low performance, departmental errors, policy disagreements or personal scandal in order to restore confidence in government.

Findings from the UK suggest that there is a relationship between the age of a minister and resignation hazards, where young and old ministers are most at risk (Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Berlinski et al., 2007). Studies in the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany suggest that politically related characteristics seem to matter more to ministerial survival, such as previous parliamentary background and significant cabinet experience (Bäck et.al, 2009a; Fischer and Kaiser, 2009; Bovens et al., 2010: 331). More experienced ministers with political "credit" (Bovens et al., 2010) are less likely to resign than political newcomers because of their understanding of how the (in-) formal procedures work and their broader political power base (Berlinski et al., 2007; Bäck et al., 2012). Other calculations also determine the relative importance of an individual minister to the Prime Minister. A minister who holds a high position in the party, is "closer" to the Prime Minister or holds a more "important portfolio" is bound to have more protection (Dowding and MacLeay, 2011: 125; Hansen et al., 2013). On the other hand, a minister with strong political support can also be a leadership contender and a crisis in his/her portfolio might be an opportunity to set him/her back. Prior setbacks are, according to some studies, also increasing the risk of resignation (Dowding and Dumont, 2009; Hansen et al., 2013). Notwithstanding these possible mixed motives I expect to find that *ministers with prior cabinet experience and high positions in the governing party are less likely to resign than ministers that are without experience and position.*

A key institutional variable is whether the cabinet is rooted in a coalition or single-party government. Several studies suggest it is less likely that ministers will be fired during coalition governments (Dowding and Dumont, 2009:13; Bäck et al. 2012; Hansen et al., 2013). Prime Ministers are more constrained within a coalition setting since ministerial resignations and ensuing cabinet reshuffles might compromise relationships within the coalition. Dowding and Dumont (2009: 15) further suggest that the "corrective effect" of firing a minister becomes

more straightforward in single-party cabinets. I expect to find that *ministers in coalition governments are less likely to resign as a result of crisis-induced accountability pressures than ministers in single-party governments.*

7.3 Methods and data

To examine the factors proposed as salient to crisis accountability and ministerial tenure, a comparative case study design of ten crisis events in Sweden has been executed. They all constituted situations of severe accountability pressures on cabinet ministers. The framework was derived from existing literatures that offer plausible explanations to the variation in outcome. The design follows primarily the logic of a small to medium–N comparative analysis based on several empirical observations within a limited number of cases (George and Bennett, 2005; Blatter and Haverland, 2012:18-20). A limited number of cases allows for a deeper discussion of blame management strategies, which is at the core here, but at the same time clearly has limits with regard to identifying causal mechanisms. The analysis is a plausibility probe aimed at facilitating a discussion about the theoretically informed propositions (George and Bennett, 2005; Ragin, 2008). Sweden was selected because the high number of accountability mechanisms and venues available and the open access to public information (Svedin, 2012:1) and yet crisis accountability and ministerial resignations is an understudied phenomenon. Sweden has a tradition of long serving single-party socialist government and short-term complex coalition governments, which should reflect differences in dealing with crisis-induced resignations, both between single-party and multi-party governments as well as within similar type of governments over time. Cases were selected by using the following six criteria:

1. Identified as a national crisis event in crisis literature,
2. Placed accountability pressures on incumbent minister,
3. Policy area falls within the top 10 of 99 identified in the SEDEPE (2010) codebook.
4. Occurred within what Sundström (2009) has coined "the contemporary era of Swedish politics, 1980–2012",
5. Adequately documented in databases and articles online,
6. Overall sample contain sufficient variation in the dependent variable.

A crisis with its' characteristics challenges decision-makers and institutions (Boin et al., 2005; Svedin, 2012:14) and is according to 't Hart (1993) a potentially delegitimizing situation, involving criticism requiring responses and triggering defensive routines on behalf of leaders. Three sources were used to identify 44 crisis events that triggered accountability pressures on a national level: Svedin

(2012), CRISMART's case bank, and Swedish Emergency Management Agency (SEMA). The presence of high accountability pressures identified in media and prior research rather than the type of crisis constitute the basis for selection. Cases therefore originate from different (top) policy sectors, more or less politically "sensitive", not fully factored in here. Ten cases were selected within the stipulated time span, five of these had resulted in a responsible minister or junior minister resigning.

In examining *blame management* I follow Boin et al (2008) *crisis exploitation* framework and apply two aspects of framing blame that can lead to accountability pressures on ministers: agency/causality and responsibility. *Agency and causality* framed by actors in terms of immediate causes, referred to as 'technical, natural or man-made causes' involving specific references to 'failures' by 'lower level operators or agencies' external to government. Or actors can refer to larger 'system failures' and by 'top political actors', internal to government (Hood, 2011). *Responsibility* is framed to either a specific 'individual actor' that is pinned to the problem, or a complex and broader 'network of actors' responsible through 'joint decisions' or by inheriting each other's policies.

Regarding individual and cabinet characteristics, I follow Bäck et al. (2012:1) by coding ministers as having political experience if they held previous ministerial positions and parliamentary experience. Those who were a member of the party's elite inner circles (*verkställande utskott* or *partistyrelsen*) were coded as having a high position in the party. Ministers who were part of a government with several parties in the cabinet were coded as "coalition government", and ministers in minority governments (with supporting parties outside the cabinet) were coded as "single-party government." The coding scheme was developed based on two prior codebooks: the SEDEPE codebook (2010) regarding contextual variables (e.g. ranking of policy area/portfolio, type of government/cabinet and reason for exit); and the codebook by Brändström and Kuipers (2003) that operationalizes three interrelated steps of framing and employing blame strategies.

A comparative content analysis was performed to identify the variance in meaning-making strategies of actors (incumbent ministers) and forums (media, parliament and political opposition). Several well established and respected national media sources as well as government sources were used including:

- Dagens Nyheter (DN) – a daily Swedish national newspaper [120]
- Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) – a daily Swedish national newspaper [121]
- Sveriges Television (SvT) – Swedish national public TV broadcaster [122]

120 www.dn.se
121 www.svd.se
122 www.svt.se

- Sveriges Radio (SR) – Sweden's national publicly funded radio broadcaster [123]
- Sveriges riksdag – Swedish Parliament [124]
- Sveriges regering – Swedish Government [125]
- Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap (MSB) – Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency [126]

Biographical information about the ministers and cabinets were collected primarily from various reports in data banks, libraries, and web sites available via the Swedish Parliament and Swedish Government. All codes were registered and observations per variable counted. For cases prior to 1992, there was less material available online, and consequently secondary sources have been used to complement certain crisis periods. The variables pertaining to blame management; agency/causality and responsibility, was counted equally as the contextual variables; ministerial position, prior experience and type of cabinet. This removed some sensitivity in the analysis of blame strategies where variables are less amenable to strict coding rules and could have a greater range of interpretations (See Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 1997). Here, specific words and references supporting a frame were crudely valued equally and observations coded as "present" when more than half supported a specific frame and as "absent" when less than half of the observations supported a specific frame. In order to enhance coding reliability a coding test was performed by another person producing the same results.[127]

Framing blame is a dynamic process where strategies adapt and change over time, and this fact needs to be acknowledged. For the overall assessment of what constituted the dominant perception of causality and blame in each event (over time), coded observations was compared with the conclusions of prior case studies, e.g., academic studies, media accounts, and official reports (for example, Sundelius, et al., 1997; Lindgren, 2003; Daléus, 2012; Svedin, 2012). Four propositions were used to compare and discuss patterns across the two case-categories of resignations and non-resignations and the results are summarized briefly in tables 7.2–7.4 and in the analysis.

123 www.sr.se
124 www.riksdagen.se
125 www. regeringen.se
126 www.msb.se
127 Coding scheme with instructions, coding sheets per case and empirical material including richer case descriptions can be obtained via email from author: annikambm@gmail.com

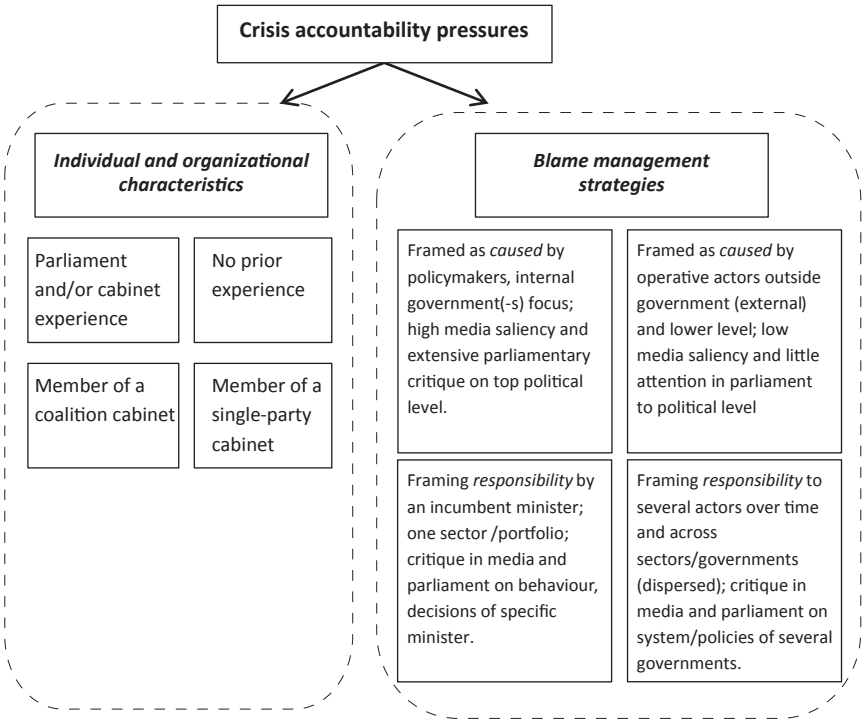

Figure 7.1: Blame management and ministerial careers framework

7.4 Context and cases: Crisis management politics in Sweden

According to the Swedish Constitution, introduced in the early 1900s, the Prime Minister is proposed by the Parliament Speaker and then formally accepted or declined through a vote in Parliament (see Larsson, 1997). The candidate PM is then free to propose the selection of ministers and their portfolios. There are few formal criteria that need to be fulfilled, except for a minimum of 10 years of Swedish citizenship. The system is rather unique in that ministers have limited influence over government agencies in specific cases. Ministerial rule ("*minister-styre*" in Swedish) is not allowed and there are clear limitations to how ministers can interact with government agencies.

Formally all government decisions are taken by the collective, in which all of the ministers' votes are counted equally. With few exceptions, a collective vote requires five ministers present (see Sundström, 2009; Bäck et al., 2008). Studies show a tendency for crisis accountability to be executed increasingly through media and public inquiries and less through parliament scrutiny, for instance in the Standing Committee on the Constitution (Svedin, 2012:166). In a study by Hansen et al. (2013) the turnover rate of Swedish ministers between 1967–2008

was 0.68 percent (lower than Denmark and Norway) and 63 ministers were dismissed during that period. Despite this, there are several instances where ministers did resign in relation to crisis events. Below the ten crisis cases are briefly illustrated.

Table 7.1: Ten crisis events in Sweden

The non-resignations	Minister
The ***murder of the Swedish PM Palme*** in 1986 initiated a massive investigation and manhunt that despite infinite hours and resources did not solve the murder. This spurred infected disputes between responsible agencies and growing critique of the responsible politicians for the failed system. The Minister of Justice was under heavy fire but managed to stay on (Hansén, 2000).	Minister of Justice Sten Wickbom
In the ***Bofors affair*** in 1986 a whistleblower leaked that the weapons manufacturer Bofors had bribed high Indian officials to accept a large weapon deal. A series of dubious arms deals were uncovered and a political blaming debate ensued. The Foreign Minister who was heavily criticized in media, denied having any knowledge about bribes (SR, 20 May 2004; SvT, 24 February 2006; Svedin, 2012b).	Minister of Foreign Affairs Sten Andersson
During the two ***monetary crises*** of 1992, Sweden, after several futile attempts to protect the Swedish currency from speculation, abandoned the fixed exchange rate and threw Sweden into a major economic and political crisis. Broad political consensus quickly deteriorated into a blame game but the sitting Minister of Finance remained in her seat (Sundelius et al., 1997:110; Daléus, 2012).	Minister of Finance Anne Wibble
When the passenger ferry ***Estonia*** in 1994 sank in international waters, 852 passengers perished. The international response was poor the temporary Swedish government (in place after recent elections) and responsible authorities, were heavily criticized for failing to respond in the acute situation and bad decisions in the aftermath that caused a trauma with a long shadow (Haspers, 1998; Svedin 2012b).	Minister of Communication Ines Uusman
In 2002 it was revealed that the Swedish government had decided on the ***expulsion of two Egyptian asylum seekers*** on the grounds of suspected terrorist plans. They were collected in Sweden by a foreign government agency and subjected to brutal and demeaning treatment. Who had actually signed off on this decision became an issue for a blame game where the minister claimed she was not involved and the Security Police claimed they acted upon clear orders from her (Hansén and Stern, 2003; Svedin, 2012b:79).	Minister of Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh
The resignations	**Minister**
In 1987 the notorious Swedish grand spy, ***Stig Bergling***, escaped from prison while on parole and made his way to Russia. Several investigations of police procedures, the judicial system and lack of appropriate government policy that had facilitated his symbolic escape. The Minister of Justice resigned after a parliamentary hearing (SvT, 26 March 1979, 7 October 1987; SvD, 17 February 1988; Swedish Government Report SOU 1989:18; Wangenfors, 1999).	Minister of Justice Sten Wickbom

The Ebbe Carlsson Affair in 1988 unraveled a secret organization within the police that had been undertaking a parallel investigation into the murder of PM Palme applying illegal methods. The head of the investigation team could show a written consent from the Minister of Justice and a massive political turbulence followed. The minister claimed she had been deceived and resigned facing a hearing in Parliament (SvT, 27 July 1988; Hansén and Hagström, 2004; SR, 23 December 2007).	Minister of Justice Anna-Greta Leijon
On Christmas day 2004 a ***tsunami*** hit the beaches of south East Asia. In Sweden, the news travelled fast but the response by the government was slow and ill communicated to relieve the approximately 40,000 Swedish citizens and thousands affected. A media hunt for political accountability followed leading to the resignation of the PM's state secretary and Minister of Foreign Affairs (Brändström et al., 2008).	Minister of Foreign Affairs Laila Freivalds
In 2007 the ***investment bank Carnegie*** was exposed for serious mishandling and insider trading. Carnegie had a close relationship with the government and acted as financial advisor. A fierce political debate on the decision by the government to use Carnegie followed. A chief advisor and a State Secretary both from within Carnegie were forced to resign but the responsible minister stayed (SvT, 1 October 2007; SvD, 3 October 2007; Naraghi, 2008).	State Secretary Funered Minister of Financial Markets Mats Odell
In 2012 another secret ***arms deal affair*** between Sweden and Saudi-Arabia was uncovered. The legality and appropriateness of the deal signed off by the Swedish government erupted in a media storm similar to that of the Bofors Affair. The Minister of Defence made several public appearances to fend off critique with no success. Accusations of a political "cover-up" spread and the minister resigned (SR, 6 March 2012; SvD, 9 and 29 March 2012).	Minister of Defence Sten Tolgfors

7.5 Analysis: Crisis and ministerial accountability in Sweden

Prior studies about framing causality suggest that ministers who were able to stay on in their position framed causality in terms of lower level operational causes rather than subscribe them to political actors.

Table 7.2: Blame management strategies on causality

Cases	Minister frame causality to lower level actors	Media frame causality to system/high-level actors	Outcome
Palme	P	A	N-R
Bofors	P	A	N-R
Monetary	A	P	N-R
Estonia	P	A	N-R
Asylum seekers	P	A	N-R
Bergling	P	A	R
Ebbe Carlsson	P	A	R
Tsunami	A	A	R
Carnegie	P	A	R
Weapons affair	P	P	R

A = Absent. P = Present. R = Resignation. N = No resignation.

Table 7.2 indicates that this proposition is supported in the Swedish cases where ministers as well as media tended to ascribe the causes of crises to lower level operational and exogenous actors with little contest over causality at policy level. This pattern applies equally to cases of both resignations and non-resignations. In eight out of ten cases ministers and journalists focused on failures of operators in the field, not the role of policy and policy makers. For example, in the Bofors weapons affair scandal, the Minister of Foreign Affairs accused the defense industry actors and stated that: "*the dirty laundry of the defense industry will be washed properly and publicly*".[128]

Events that differed from this pattern were the recent Saudi Arabia weapons affair where controversial information circulated on the top news about shadow companies financed by the military intelligence. Despite this explosive information pointing clearly at operative actors almost all media coverage focused on the minister (SR, 6 March 2012). In one case, the twin monetary crisis, causality was framed at the policy level. When the currency fell, the incumbent Prime Minister and his Minister of Finance were accused of having caused the situation through a series of poor decisions and a failed monetary reform. The opposition was, in turn, fiercely blamed for not having continued its commitment to defend the currency (SvD, 22 November 1992; DN, 23 November 1992). These two cases represent different ministerial survival outcomes (see table 7.2). So even if flawed government decisions in both events were seen as having caused or aggravated the crisis, framing causality by top political actors is not by itself a sufficient condition for driving the ministers to resign.

Table 7.3: Blame management strategies on responsibility

Cases	Minister accept responsibility	Minister disperse responsibility	Parliament critique on minister	Resignation calls by political opposition	Criticism of minister from media	Outcome
Palme	A	P	P	A	A	N-R
Bofors	A	P	P	A	P	N-R
Monetary	A	P	P	A	P	N-R
Estonia	P	P	P	A	A	N-R
Asylum seekers	A	P	P	A	P	N-R
Bergling	A	P	P	P	P	R
Ebbe Carlsson	P	A	P	P	P	R
Tsunami	A	A	P	A	P	R
Carnegie	P	A	P	P	P	R
Weapons affair	A	P	P	P	P	R

A = Absent. P = Present. R = Resignation. N = No resignation.

128 All translations by author.

Another pattern is revealed when we focus on the political bottom line of who should take responsibility. Whether or not ministers assume responsibility willingly the accountability pressures by political opposition and media can lead to forced resignations. Only in two of the resignation events did the minister publicly assume responsibility to (see table 7.3). For instance, the criminal investigation of the financial institute Carnegie had little to do with its advisory role to the Minister of Financial Markets. But, the prospect of the political damage that the ties to Carnegie could inflict on the government was apparent. When put under pressure, the minister readily admitted that it had been a somewhat "*hasty decision*" to involve Carnegie in the first place and consequently, state secretary Funered were forced to resign (Naraghi, 2008; SvD, 3 October 2007). In the other three resignation cases, the ministers claimed other causes for their resignations.

Framing responsibility as dispersed between many (other) political or external actors seem to be a bottom-line strategy that is facilitated in the Swedish system of collective decision-making and not a very strong indicator of successful blame management. The cabinet's collective responsibility opens the door to the 'many hands' argument. In all five non-resignation cases there were strong intimations that many ministers and governments had been involved and could be held responsible. In two of the resignation cases the ministers tried but failed to disperse responsibility (Bergling and Saudi Affair) to previous governments or external actors (see table 7.3).

Pressure and "calls" from external arenas seem to matter more. When the involvement of the Minister of Justice in allowing Ebbe Carlsson's illegal measures in the search for Prime Minister Palme's murderer became clear there were few strategies that she could employ to disperse blame and avoid critique. Upon her resignation, the opposition leader commented: "*Since the government has had a representative in the police investigation, they have obviously already taken on responsibility and should continue to do so*" (SvT, 10 September 1987). The Prime Minister, in her defense, regretted she "*had committed a mistake which the opposition could not forgive*" (SR, 23 December 2007).

Ministers that appear not "popular" or suffer a credibility deficit with external forums seem more vulnerable to prolonged external critique. In the aftermath inquiries into the Swedish rescue response to the tsunami in South East Asia a handful of ministers received devastating judgments. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, who received most critique, resigned six months later claiming other causes to step down (DN, 29 December 2005). However, with an already tarnished reputation following a prior resignation from a ministerial position due to a personal economic scandal, she quickly became a liability to the Prime Minister and the overall popularity of the government, triggering growing critique from the political opposition and media. Another minister who had almost resigned from his post in relation to the murder of PM Palme was Minister of Justice, Wickbom. After the escape of the spy Bergling the political opposition accused him of having failed to ensure national security claiming: "*someone had to take*

responsibility" (SvT, 7 October 1987). Upon his resignation, the Prime Minister was accused in Parliament for having scapegoated Wickbom: *"In a socialist society, responsibility is easily shared by everybody and assumed by nobody*" (Swedish Parliamentary Records 1987: nr 10:11).

A pattern that is clearly present (four of five cases) is that the political opposition's public criticism and calls for resignations of an incumbent minister is significant in forcing resignations (see table 7.3), which is not common in Swedish everyday politics. In the cases where ministers did not resign, there was criticism but no resignation calls. However, grievances from the opposition alone do not end the career of ministers. Standing out from the pattern above, the frequent parliamentary criticism (all cases) of ministers rarely seems to have an impact on their propensity to resign (see Svedin, 2012). To conclude, Swedish ministers seem to be most at risk when there is a combination of strong public pressure from external arenas (media and the opposition) concentrating on one minister.

Table 7.4: Cabinet and individual characteristics of ministers

Cases	Coalition government	High party position	Previous ministerial experience	Member of Parliament	Outcome
Palme	A	A	A	A	N-R
Bofors	A	P	P	P	N-R
Monetary	P	A	A	P	N-R
Estonia	A	A	A	P	N-R
Asylum seekers	A	P	P	P	N-R
Bergling	A	A	A	A	R
Ebbe Carlsson	A	A	P	P	R
Tsunami	A	A	P	A	R
Carnegie	P	A	A	A	R
Weapons affair	P	P	P	P	R

A = Absent. P = Present. R = Resignation. N = No resignation.

It was expected that previous ministerial experience and strong standing in their own party function as a source of protection for ministers. However, table 7.4 suggests that a minister does not sit safer merely through prior experience as a cabinet minister. In fact, in three of five cases it was ministers with prior ministerial experience that resigned. In the events where ministers managed to stay in their position, a majority (three of five) did not have any previous cabinet experience. Being a Member of Parliament was not expected to be a very important factor but seems to help ministers stay in their positions.

When examining whether minsters holding senior party positions are less at risk some findings are interesting. There are only two cases which centered on

ministers with key positions in the party and who were expected to have bright political futures. The Minister of Defence who resigned after the Saudi Arabia Weapons deal affair was part of the party "inner circle" and close to the Prime Minister. In the Bofors arms deal affair the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was widely believed to be the next Prime Minister, managed to stay in office in part by letting other ministers take the debate.

In two other cases, the "big beast" ministers could easily have been implicated but were efficiently kept away from the crisis spotlights. In the aftermath of the expulsion of two Egyptian asylum seekers it became clear that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had personally approved that foreign agents could pick up the two men in Sweden. At the time, the minister was expected to become the first female Prime Minister in Sweden, was much liked in parliament and with an untarnished record. Years later, the details about the affair became public and the retired Prime Minister spoke about his knowledge of the affair and having protected his minister at all costs (SvD, 10 September 2013). In the Carnegie affair the Minister for Financial Markets was under pressure, not the Minister of Finance (Borg) even though all matters of the government finances fall under his area of responsibility (SvD, 8 April 2010). Being a valuable minister and a key person to the party and Prime Minister, Borg was kept out of the debate. To conclude, ministers with parliamentary background are more represented in the non-resignation cases. More notably, it seems that ministers with prior ministerial experience actually run a higher risk of post-crisis resignations, which fits with the notion that young and old ministers are most at risk (Dewan and Dowding, 2005).

Examining the effects of coalition governments' versus single-party governments' give weak indications. Most Swedish governments of the post-war era have been single-party Social-Democratic governments. However, three crisis events unfolded under coalition governments (the Carnegie affair, the Saudi Arabia weapons affair, and the twin monetary crises). In two of these events ministers or state secretaries resigned. It is an indication in line with prior research findings that it might be *more difficult* because of political deliberations, to force a minister of a coalition government to resign.

7.6 Conclusion

In this study the political aftermath of ten crisis episodes in Sweden have been reviewed to examine ministerial survival after accountability pressures. Similar to Boin et al. (2008) the results suggest that a combination of factors is important. Individual and cabinet factors both limit and allow for specific framing strategies to be adopted.

First, regarding blame management, successful framing strategies of causality and responsibility is shaped through the continuous interplay between the actors and forums involved, requiring skill and acceptance on the arenas on which they are operated. Positions change when the blaming process evolves; requiring leaders to constantly be on top of the political game, a finding that is borne out by others (see Boin et al., 2005; Boin et al., 2009; Coombs, 2011). In the case of Sweden, the most important driver of ministerial resignations seems to be the combination of intense accountability pressures (blame frames) in the media and public demands for resignations by the political opposition. Impropriety and deceit seem more dangerous than incompetence especially to ministers who are more experienced, since they are held to higher standards. More "important" ministers were kept out of the crisis accountability spotlights, effects that are also captured in other studies of portfolio saliency and turnover rates in Germany, Sweden and the UK (Hansen et al., 2013; Berlinski et al., 2007).

Second, regarding the impact of constitutional and individual factors and the fate of ministers, there are some indications. Resolving the crisis of the day by firing a minister may shake the stability of the coalition and undermine the power base of the government. This and other comparative studies indicate that a minister without a power base in Parliament, who is not a party "big beast", is at greater risk. However, "seniority" in terms of prior ministerial positions coincides with higher resignation numbers (see Dewan and Dowding, 2005).

As expected in the outset of this study, the two theoretical perspectives applied complement each other in several ways and the implications of this study are straightforward. It is widely acknowledged that blame management studies need to better include contextual factors (e.g. individual, institutional, cultural and situational) in the analysis to help explain why blame processes develop as they do (Boin et al., 2009; Fischer, 2012; Hansen et al., 2013). Ministerial tenure research provides a framework that can potentially fill these gaps, if methodological challenges are carefully considered. This strand of literature considers all resignations, whereas accountability and blame management studies consider only a subset of high-profile "resignation events" (unrelated to personal lives of ministers or party-induced struggles and reshuffles). They also complement one another in focus: tenure literature only summarily describes ministerial behavior and tactics during resignation episodes (prior to resignation/non-resignation), whereas the blame/accountability management literature offers an explicit and theoretically informed systematic account (most notably in Bovens et al., 1999; Brändström and Kuipers, 2003; Hood, 2011). The how and why of ministerial behavior in such circumstances is in focus, with the aim of explaining the outcomes of resignation events in individual episodes (in tenure literature such episodes are more like data points in larger studies). Methodologically, it poses a challenge to try to combine these factors in a conceptual framework and there are few prior multivariate studies in this vein. This study is an attempt to practically

address this challenge and illustrate an example of how these two perspectives can be combined and operationalized in studying post-crisis induced ministerial resignations. Knowledge that could enrich both research agendas. Furthermore, there are four specific perspectives that are worth exploring in future studies:

1. In the interaction between actors and forums further distinguish between causes and responsibility discourses, considering the longevity and intensity of accountability pressures and the formal and informal accountability forums and arenas, where different rules of engagement apply.
2. The internal and external dimension of accountability, where pressures arise from "within" or from "outside" (compare institutional vs situational crisis triggers) is likely to affect the formulation of blame narratives and blame strategies by coalition and single-party cabinets who are likely to address this differently. The role of "inner cabinets" is yet to be understood here.
3. Recent studies (Curtin et al., forthcoming) has observed differences in the career development for women and men in Westminster cabinets, in portfolios and positions over time. In this study, the distribution between men and women in resignations and non-resignations is fairly even, reflecting the gender distribution in cabinets in Sweden. However, this is an important factor that should be explored much more in depth in relation to the formulation and effects of blame strategies.[129]
4. Controversies or "personal error" or "scandals" as a cause for resignations documented in other studies (Dowding and Lewis, 2012:15) is likely to be a growing cause also in Sweden. The level of "trust" and political capital a political appointee has with media and his/her own peer can deteriorate quickly and reflect the formulation of blame narratives and is likely to spur more offensive blame management strategies.

129 See also Walther, J. (forthoming).

Chapter 8: General discussion and reflections

8.1 Discussion on empirical findings

In this chapter I recapture and present the dissertation as a whole and discuss the findings from the empirical chapters in light of the research question formulated in the introduction. The main focus and general research question of this book, as presented in the introductory chapter, address *what demands on political office-holders are triggered by crisis events, how do they manage such demands, and what implications do these have for their political survival?* In examining this question, I applied a conceptual framework (developed in Brändström and Kuipers, 2003), which was amended and evolved during the course of the four empirical studies included in this dissertation (see chapters 4–7). The framework was initially based upon literature on crisis accountability and blame management. It focused on examining the course and outcomes of accountability processes during critical events, where blame management strategies were employed by public office-holders facing crisis-induced accountability pressures and sometimes calls for resignation. In chapters 4 and 5 the initial framework was tested on several crisis accountability events. Each chapter had a theoretical ambition and attempted to contribute explanations and factors from different fields of literature to the analysis by responding to some of the unresolved issues and gaps identified in earlier research. The same basic conceptual framework and similar questions were addressed in all the case studies, with minor variations in terms of focus and design. The substance of the arguments, focus, and empirical locus are briefly revisited here.

Chapter 4: "The politics of tsunami responses: Comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia"[130] – This chapter compared three Nordic governments' parallel responses to one single event: the tsunami in Southeast Asia in 2004. The co-authors and I inferred three propositions that we argued are relevant to understanding crisis-induced accountability processes and how blame management strategies were applied simultaneously by the top political leadership in these three countries. The Nordic countries have similar social/cultural and administrative/political systems and many of their citizens were deeply affected by the devastating tsunami. However, we saw great differences in their responses and the political consequences of these responses. The tsunami crisis was caused by external factors and we saw that crisis management became highly politicized when key actors failed to take responsibility and respond to public concerns. We could see that in Sweden the formal delegation of authority (political/administrative system) and informal concentration of power (prime ministerial style) negatively influenced the possibilities for the incumbent elites to deflect blame once they were targeted. There was no agency at arms' length that would allow for a blame shift to a delegated agency. Consequently, we came to the conclusion that the higher the degree of formal delegation and perceived centralization of executive power, the more likely the blame will be pushed up the governmental hierarchy in open parliamentary democracies.

Another interesting finding was that the initiation of high-level parliamentary committees in the three countries had very different effects. In comparison, the Swedish government waited the longest with assigning a committee. Difficulty in finding the "right" non-partisan and high-level chairperson was claimed to be the reason. However, the appearance of a slow response rendered even more negative media reports about not taking the matter serious enough and there were even allegations that information was being withheld from the public with the hope that public interest would fade. This further escalated the political dimensions of the crisis. This aspect of accountability management strategies in relation to expectations and synchronized with other actions is also mentioned in several other chapters in this book. What in some situations seems to be a very good strategy (and may have even worked before) will in other situations be perceived completely different when compared with what others (e.g., opponents and colleagues) are doing. In this chapter we examined an externally caused event which may also have affected the pattern of accountability and blame management. These core findings strengthen the notion that we need to look at blame management from the perspective of a dynamic and relational process, where both actors and arenas

130 This chapter was first published as: Brändström, Annika, Sanneke Kuipers, and Pär Daleus (2008) "The politics of tsunami responses: comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia" In *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning,* edited by Arjen Boin, Allan McConnell and Paul 't Hart. Cambridge University Press.

change. Incumbent policy makers will interact and reformulate their strategies based on the level of attention and criticism they receive and the way in which other actors choose to operate and communicate.

Chapter 5: "Chasing evil, defending atrocities: Blame avoidance and prisoner abuse during the war in Iraq"[131] – This chapter was based on the same conceptual framework (as in chapter 4) examining how various blame management strategies were used in a limited number of 'similar' crisis events. But the empirical focus, design, and logic differed. Here we compared the accountability process through the response to allegations of prisoner abuse exercised by the US and British governments during the Iraqi war. The "crisis" in this case was caused by internal factors (bad policy-making) rather than an external cause like in the tsunami case (natural disaster). The aim was to examine and compare blame management strategies in an 'internal' crisis. We chose to include other actors (scrutinizing international organizations) and other arenas (public inquiries as well as the media) that we thought were more relevant to studying endogenously caused crisis events and we focused explicitly on policy and political processes. We found that these 'crisis' events were perceived as caused by the decision-makers and consequently this influenced the decision-makers' strategies and their choice of arenas for accountability management. The opponents' criticism and scrutiny as well as the patterns of inquiries and sanctions on both the individual and institutional levels were different than those observed in other crises.

Both governments appeared guilty of significant structural violation of human rights. In the US information about the events and about the top policy makers' responses was shared openly and early. International organizations were quick to respond and criticize US actions, in particular those that appeared to be bad policy and scapegoating politics. The Bush administration took the full impact of criticism during its incumbency and, in general, criticism was directed higher up in the political system already at the start. In the UK, full disclosure was not given until long after the responsible politicians had been replaced by their opponents. Apparently there was little or no interest in escalating the issue further at that point in the UK, and there were few serious investigations and basically few political consequences as a result.

An explicit question posed in chapter 5 was whether we could see any particular blame management responses regarding ethical violations. All government failures caused or aggravated by a crisis contain ethical aspects. Did a blameworthy and intentional act cause the crisis and did the decision-makers

131 This chapter was first published as: Kuipers, Sanneke, Kasia Kochanska, and Annika Brändström (2011) "Chasing evil, defending atrocities: Blame avoidance and prisoner abuse during the war in Iraq." In *Ethics and Crisis Management*, edited by Lina Svedin. Information Age Publishing.

knowingly jeopardize people's lives and/or important values? Beyond this, we cannot see that ethical rhetoric in the accountability phase led to any particular meaning-making strategies being crafted. We found the British response to be more proportional to the public's reaction. When allegations were raised at the operational level, a few officers were scapegoated after lengthy investigations. When criticism was aimed at the political level, several consecutive ministers of defense managed to credibly place these events in a larger narrative of war, which supported breaching certain military codes of conduct.

Chapter 6: "Crisis, accountability, blame management and ministerial careers: The Netherlands"[132] – This chapter had a different analytical and empirical focus. A core aim of this chapter was to further develop the conceptual framework by combining it with another theoretical perspective. This proved useful, and the theoretical and analytical perspectives complemented each other. The main conclusions of this chapter can be summarized in two parts. Blame management studies can be enriched by including and giving greater consideration to individual, institutional, cultural, and situational factors in the analysis in order to gain more insight into what enables and restrains certain tactics and behavior. On the other hand, ministerial tenure studies can benefit from a better understanding of 'how' and 'why' ministers resign in these particular 'high-profile' events.

We found that this was a well worth endeavor and that the analytical merit of this conceptual framework was enhanced by clarifying some of the context in which blame management strategies are applied and how those influence success or failure. When examining individual experiences, we also included prior calls for resignation and connected the success or failure of particular strategies to different learning patterns. Previous crisis studies tell us that institutional learning and reform are less common during crisis events but that learning as a political and social process is more often visible. In our opinion, the different blame management outcomes and the choices leading to resignation or remaining in office could in themselves be regarded as 'political learning'. Furthermore, the notion that 'high-politics' leads to ministerial resignations did not hinder other types of institutional learning in the cases studied here; this somewhat contradicts the findings from other crisis research. In this chapter we examined crisis-induced accountability processes of events in the Netherlands and their effect on the careers of political office-holders. In the Netherlands there is a strong tradition of broad coalition governments. Thereafter, I examined a similar number of crisis-induced accountability processes relating to events in Sweden, with an equally strong

132 This chapter was first published as: Brändström, Annika and Marij Swinkels (2015) "Crisis accountability and career management in the Netherlands" In *Organizing After Crisis*, edited by Nathalie Schiffino, Laurent Taskin, Celine Donis, and Julien Raone. Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing Group.

tradition of single-party governments. A variable included in the analysis and believed to be relevant to career management by politicians in crisis situations is the type of government: single-party or coalition. The relevant empirical findings from the Dutch study are discussed below in comparison with the findings from the Swedish studies, designed in a similar way but did not explicitly address the issue of learning (chapter 7).

Chapter 7: "Crisis, accountability, blame management and ministerial careers: Sweden"[133] – This was a continued effort in testing the applicability of the conceptual framework used in chapter 6 but with some minor adaptation to the Swedish political and administrative system. The analytical focus remained the same but the empirical base was increased slightly. Ten national crisis accountability events in Sweden that has significant consequences for cabinet ministers and junior ministers were analyzed, and then compared with eight Dutch cases. From both sets we can conclude that calling ministers to resign as a forceful correctional and sanctioning act triggered by a prime minister in an attempt to (re) direct blame was a successful strategy only in single-party cabinets. In Sweden, early termination of a minister's post during coalition governments was often linked to personal involvement in failures or scandals that were not consistent with the party's overall political program or policies. These ministers almost never were able to make a comeback to a new cabinet portfolio. In single-party cabinets, which until recently were common in Sweden, there were more instances of individual ministers being called to resign over crisis accountability. Previous research suggests that within a single-party cabinet the prime minister can shuffle ministers around more easily with little or no consideration for the other coalition members. In addition, this is believed to be a more 'direct' sanctioning tool that works to keep other ministers in line. In coalition settings the risk of disturbing the internal dynamic of the coalition restrains the practice of using ministers as scapegoats as a strategy for blame management. In the Netherlands, where coalition governments are the norm rather than the exception, we could see a different pattern (chapter 6). Besides using calls for resignation as direct "corrective" sanctions we also saw that the ministers, who resigned as a result of a crisis, used other explanation logic compared with Swedish ministers. They more often framed their resignations in terms of a greater perspective, that someone had to take responsibility and that it was time to make way for another leader. Resignations were more common directly after elections and less often forced when a person was close to ending a term. Consistent with this, the Dutch ministers who resigned also reappeared and moved on to future top political positions more easily after their resignations.

133 This chapter was first published as: Brändström Annika (2015) "Crisis accountability and ministerial resignations in Sweden." *Scandinavian Political Studies.* Volume 38, Issue 3: 217–320.

Now that I have revisited the main findings and presented the conceptual framework, I will turn to the general research question posed at the outset of this book. What do we know now that we did not know when this research effort was first undertaken?

8.2 When are blaming strategies used?

Blame management strategies are used to deflect, shape, and direct the attribution of blame to avoid being sanctioned. The need to attribute blame occurs when members of accountability forums – journalists, parliamentarians, investigators, web communities – feel that a major negative event has occurred and that someone should take responsibility for it. Crisis-induced accountability pressure appears when it is established that something blameworthy has happened in relation to a crisis; a perception that crucial values have been threatened and that the responsible authorities have been unwilling, incapable, or otherwise ineffective in addressing these threats. Thereafter, the process of accountability management tends to evolve through a number of discussions.

Crisis-induced accountability processes take place in different forums – formal and informal, as well as technical, legal and political ones - and are often focused on several office-holders and agencies. Here, the focus was on incumbent top policy makers and how they dealt with their political opponents, critics, and expert opinion. In this study, the cabinet ministers within parliamentary systems are perceived as ultimately responsible for all aspects that fall under their portfolio, including their department, policy, and policy implementation. Cabinet ministers are increasingly also held responsible for personal errors and failure to perform. The prime minister, in turn, is held responsible for the overall coherence, competence, and credibility of the government. In managing this responsibility, prime ministers can choose when, how, and for how long to support a minister facing accountability pressure and resignation calls.

In the case studies we found that an important initial activity for incumbent policymakers is to position themselves in relation to what caused the event. The most important distinction is between framing causality as caused by internal (policy/political) or external (operational or others) f (actors). An external frame means that office-holders need to argue credibly that the events in question may or may not have been foreseeable but were certainly not preventable or controllable once they occurred. For instance, we know that disasters caused by technical failures such as plane crashes and forces of nature leading to tsunamis and ash clouds will occur with some regularity. Top policy makers cannot prevent them from happening and rarely are able to control them when they do. Opponents and critics will instead try to link operations to internal workings of policy and politics. This was illustrated as the first dimension in the blaming tree figure, which was the conceptual model used as the analytic template for the case studies.

The second key dimension in the blaming tree figure is dealing with issues of responsibility. A top policy maker needs to clarify if any of his/her actions or inactions can directly be linked with the negative event. If problems are perceived to have been initiated by factors from 'within' the polity, bad/rotten policy, failed internal processes, poor decision-making, lack of oversight, or failure to keep the public and Parliament informed according to procedures, there is a good chance that political actors will be perceived as having in part caused the crisis. It then becomes very difficult to create a narrative of responsibility and accountability directed at another actor, who is outside or below the political level. If the causality factors of an erupted crisis event are unclear or can be linked with failures or problems outside of the political sphere (i.e. private companies, voluntary groups, international organizations) or on lower operative levels (government agencies and subcontractors), then questions about where responsibility and accountability should lie become the focus. In the case studies, we have seen that although causality is established as external, responsibility frames can look very different.

In the two figures below the dominant frame of causality/agency and responsibility/agency in the case studies are presented. By plotting the cases this way (that is, one figure illustrating how agency and causality were dominantly framed and the other illustrating how agency and responsibility were framed), we receive rather different results. One purpose of illustrating the cases in this way is to show that framing of causality and responsibility involves developing parallel narratives. The differences that appear between the two figures support the argument that attempts to influence/manipulate perceptions of both causality and responsibility can be effective in shaping how the crisis-induced accountability process develops and assigns responsibility and blame in a politicized environment. This figure is not a correct representation but rather generally illustrates some interesting patterns that are discussed below.

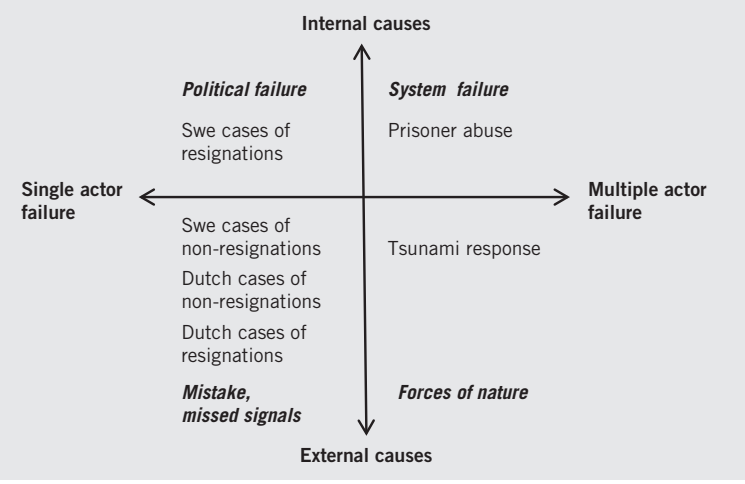

Figure 8.1: Plotting the cases according to the dominant frame of causality and agency.

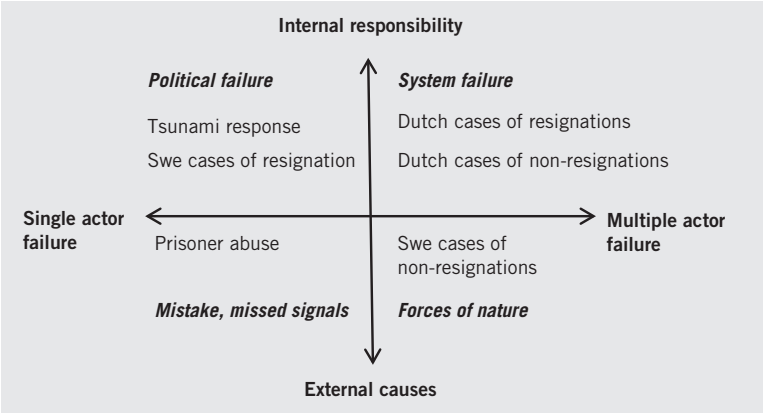

Figure 8.2: Plotting the cases according to the dominant frame of responsibility and agency.

The first observation when comparing the figures is that cases do not move downwards from internal causality frames to external responsibility frames. In all cases but one (prisoner abuse) there is movement upwards: from external to internal. This corresponds with previous research findings that responsibility and blame move up the ladder of hierarchy when they become subject to heated political blaming processes (see also Boin et al., 2009).

The tsunami case is a clear example of this effect. Blame was directed to the incumbent top political level and blaming strategies that included pointing at lower level actors were overshadowed by narratives of a failed government response and attempts to cover up. The post-crisis management phase was politicized and extended over a long period of time, which further strengthened the political dimension and in turn the political capital of the incumbent government was severely damaged. Similar patterns can be seen in other politicized post-crisis phases; for instance, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (see Boin et al. 2010) and the political consequences for the Dutch government after the Srebrenica massacre (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). The prisoner abuse cases were initially perceived as uncivilized policies and system failures. As investigations proceeded, they were increasingly interpreted as the bad judgement and failure of some individuals, both on the political and operative levels with direct consequences for operative actors and decision-makers but with almost no policy consequences. In the Dutch cases of resignations or non-resignations during post-crisis accountability processes, there was little variation between the case categories. Crises were more often framed as the result of mistakes and missed signals in otherwise functional policy systems. The fact that crisis accountability processes were managed in a coalition government setting made internal party politics less visible and the outcomes did not affect the political capital of the governments. Causality was typically framed as system failures and mistakes, outside direct government involvement, and therefore had few political consequences.

When responsibility is illustrated, we see that more often the political leadership took on responsibility because "someone had to," perhaps with mixed motives. In the Swedish cases, which are set in a context of a majority of single-party governments, there is more variation. The administrative culture of collective decision-making is often mentioned in discussions about political responsibility as a function that would diffuse responsibility. Even so, in the cases where ministers resigned, the dominant framing of both causality and responsibility were clearly centered on a single, identifiable top office-holder. There was no shielding effect through the collective decision-making argument when the focus was on internal causes. Perhaps these outcomes should be understood in the context of single-party governments being more susceptible to criticism from the opposition regarding the performance of individual ministers since there is a real opportunity to lower the political capital of the incumbent government and change electoral support. In the case of the tsunami crisis in Sweden, the actions by the political opposition were significant factors in weakening the incumbent government. Several of the studies included in this book have illustrated the point that causality and responsibility frames are two distinct narratives of a crisis: its origin and consequences. It is also clear that politicization of accountability and blame are more likely to occur and have more impact on the political capital and survival of an incumbent government.

Generally the results of this research suggest that causality could be denied by the top policy makers in Western parliamentary democracies, but not responsibility, as illustrated in the crisis cases examined in this book. Responsibility for decisions and actions connected to a problematic situation became an issue for the top policy makers, regardless of causality or proximity to the political level. Hence, strategies that focused on causality had little effect on determining how accountability and blame were allocated. Another conclusion is that accountability and responsibility can only be pushed around and (re) allocated until the dominant accountability narrative has been settled. After that there is little point in re-instating investigations and rewriting narratives. During the process of coming to a shared understanding of causality and responsibility there is substantial room for actively shaping and manipulating public perceptions. Assigning responsibility means stating which policy maker, agency, group or individual should take responsibility for failing to respond properly and/or for poor performance during a crisis. Managing blame includes formulating credible narratives on these issues and gaining support for them. Time is a factor of importance to the intensity of accountability pressures and to the political and policy outcomes. As noted by many others, accountability processes that are drawn out over time often move up the administrative and political ladder if there are powerful actors that continue to invest in the politicization of these events. An active opposition is a driving force in assigning accountability and blame to the political level, as is media coverage in framing these visible political high stake matches (see Nord and Ohlsson, 2013).

To conclude, successful strategies and 'narratives' about (all) crisis events need to have answers to three significant aspects (causality, agency, and responsibility) in order to 'hold up to scrutiny.' These narratives need to be developed simultaneously and are not sequentially dependent. Accountability and blame management strategies that consistently provide answers and explanations to these three dimensions can be effective in (re) allocating blame to a varying degree. If causality frames and responsibility frames can be successfully split up between broader spectrums of (f-) actors then (re) allocation of blame is more susceptible to manipulation. We could infer that if causality and responsibility frames are tightly linked to endogenous (f-) actors, then blame is more difficult to avoid.

The findings reported here demonstrate that different strategies are linked with various outcomes. The outcomes can generate (as described in the conceptual model of the blaming tree) a wide range of results: from scapegoating, containing the crisis on a lower political level (as exemplified in chapters 5 and 7), sanctioning operational organizations, and making adjustments to rules and procedures (see chapters 4 and 6). The most politically explosive outcome is defined as a product of errors performed by top policy makers over a longer period of time (which we saw in chapter 4). From a policy and institutional perspective the most dramatic outcome would be evidence of fundamentally flawed systems of policy making and operations. None of the crisis events examined in this book resulted in such an extreme outcome or resulted in the demand for a major change or reform.

Now the discussion is turned to how particular characteristics of individuals and institutions can influence the choice of strategies and consequences

8.3 By "whom" and "where" are blame management strategies most effective?

How accountability processes affect the political survival of incumbent policy makers who have to manage blame and the effectiveness of particular strategies are both dependent upon context. The findings here, and documented elsewhere, underline the significance that context has on the choice and effectiveness of various strategies. In some situations, certain strategies are simply not available or appropriate. To define the scope of strategies that are available and desired, the context of each crisis event needs to be clarified. In the two last empirical chapters of this book I specifically examined factors related to political/administrative systems (institutional context) and the individual characteristics of policy makers (background, experience, and political position). These theoretically derived set of factors were categorized as 'high' risk or 'low' risk for top office-holders in crisis accountability situations.

In this section I briefly revisit the model from chapters 6 and 7 and determine if these theoretically informed set of factors were relevant in the cases examined. The figure below does not indicate different values for these factors in relation to how strongly they affected the outcomes. Instead, it illustrates if individual/

organizational characteristics and blaming strategies were identified in the empirical case observations and had relevance on the blaming process or outcomes. I have demonstrated that frames about causality and responsibility are relevant to the allocation of crisis accountability. We now turn to the other aspects of our inquiry: individual factors and organizational/institutional features. In the table below, we see what factors involved the greatest risk for being sanctioned in crisis accountability events. The table also illustrates what factors were relevant or not in the case studies that were examined.

Table 8.1: Low and high risk situational factors for top office-holders in crisis accountability

Perspectives	Factors salient in crisis accountability	Level of risk to top politicians	Relevant to outcomes or not in Swedish cases	Relevant to outcomes or not in Dutch cases
Ministerial tenure literature	– Member of a coalition party	Low	No	X
	– Parliament and/or Cabinet experience	Low	Yes	Yes
	– Member of key party/holds a high position	Low	Yes	No
	– No prior votes of no confidence	Low	X	No
	– Member of a single-party cabinet	High	No	X
	– No Parliament and/or Cabinet experience	High	Yes	Yes
	– Not a member of key party/ do not hold high position	High	Yes	Yes
	– Prior votes of no confidence	High	X	No
Crisis accountability/ Blame management literature	– Dominant frame of causality as caused by strategic/ political actors, internal focus.	High	Yes	Yes
	– Dominant frame of responsibility by incumbent political leader	High	Yes	Yes
	– Dominant frame of causality as caused by lower level, operative actors, external focus.	Low	Yes	Yes
	– Dominant frame of responsibility by several political actors over time	Low	Yes	Yes

No = Observed as not relevant

Yes = Was observed as relevant

X = Not coded

First, current political power appeared to exceed prior mistakes. In addition, closeness to the prime minister (position in the party) was relevant as a shielding effect if a minister was involved in a crisis. In short, the most important ministers were not put in front of the cameras to deal with crisis-induced accountability pressures. In the Swedish cases, it appeared that being a member of a single-party cabinet entailed a higher risk of being reshuffled by the prime minister as a response to crisis accountability. This factor was not included in the Dutch study and therefore needs further examination in other countries or case populations. Political experience is likely to be important in maneuvering crisis situations in a political setting yet here the relevance is inconclusive. It is not clear how this alone helped any of the ministers who were examined in the crisis cases.

When examining the individual factors that were not considered relevant to the outcomes, the results were unexpected. We could not substantially link prior calls for resignation to cabinet ministers being fired due to performance failures during a crisis. It is possible that it has affected the longevity of their ministerial careers in the long run but there are few crisis events where prior mistakes and calls for resignation were used in the public debate to explain a minister stepping down. Prior research has found that 'personal error' or 'scandals' are often behind ministerial resignations. This is likely to raise the stakes for top level policy makers who become involved in crisis accountability processes and intuitively deserve to be further examined (see Dowding et al., 2011, 2012). The two last empirical chapters document and provide evidence for the finding that it does matter 'who' the actors are in terms of their political positions in the party, prior experiences, and seniority from previous cabinets. Prior parliamentary experience was not reported as an important factor in these cases, and therefore this should be tested further in other political/administrative systems before being discarded.

Turning to the institutional factors, the informal accountability structures within a cabinet are more important than formal accountability structures within the parliament in explaining resignations due to crisis accountability. For instance, in the Swedish resignation cases the risk that the mistakes by individual ministers would spill over and harm the work of the cabinet as a whole and decrease public support was the driving force behind the Prime Minister's decision to let individual ministers go. It was rare that demands from the Parliament instigated the termination of a minister's career. Other informal accountability actors, such as the traditional media and the growing role of social media, require other interaction and responses. Many examples in the Dutch cases illustrated the innovative use of quick communication and the framing of critical situations. Lengthy investigations are not the answer to the expectations formed in these communities. The levels of blame directed to a political decision-maker and government change over time, which can be traced through media reporting; see for instance Jennings (working paper). However, there are still few studies of how other types of social media transform this arena and how blame levels over time are affected by the instant communication that takes place.

Reflecting upon the use of blaming strategies

Prior research has produced a list of responses, ranging from completely denying the problem to various forms of shifting and directing blame to personal confessions in part or in full. Some of these strategies have been identified in the case studies here. There are also other observations that are also worth mentioning. I will now reflect upon a few other key observations about the use of strategies not explicitly included in the conceptual framework applied here. Despite that, they are potentially relevant for our understanding of crisis-induced accountability pressures and effectiveness of blame management strategies used by top office-holders.

With regards to the performance of applying strategies and their effectiveness I found that responsiveness and openness are the two most important elements of applying strategies that can have a powerful effect on how well blame can be managed. In almost all the studies included in this book, opponents, the public and the media gave positive feedback to those individuals who were active, open, and willing to participate in the crisis response and in debates on discussing the possible causes and culprits. However, this active interest and involvement had to appear sincere; if it was perceived as an attempt to manipulate or cover-up something then it only increased criticism and lowered credibility.

One significant aspect of choosing such a strategy has to do with externalizing or accepting accountability. There is the choice to push blame down or outside of one's own realm or to accept responsibility. When analyzing the cases in this book, it was clear that it is rarely a good idea to "blame anyone directly beneath you"; for instance, in the tsunami case where the Prime Minister blamed the Foreign Office. It always backlashed for governments and politicians when they publicly stated that an agency or a less senior minister should take responsibility. This finding was evident in all of the studies.

Another established strategy is to assign inquiries and high-level investigations, which is a common scheme used by policy makers and politicians to address negative events. Inquiries aim to reveal the factual course of events and to deliver non-partisan judgments of actions and responsibility combined with future recommendations. By focusing on the factual events, reforms, and suggestions for improvement, it is generally believed that accountability can be assigned in a controlled way and therefore avoid heated blame games with some degree of success (see Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2010). In the studies here it was evident that initiated inquiries had only a temporary effect on lowering the intensity of accountability and blame debates. Despite this limited effect on blame levels, as soon as policy makers announced that a fully independent inquiry by a prominent commission or institution would be launched, blame levels escalated more slowly for the period pending the inquiry (as was the case in Sweden after the tsunami). Yet on the other hand, serious problems occurred if other actors announced or requested inquiries as we saw in the aftermath of

the prisoner abuse cases. Failure to meet the expectations of an inquiry tends to direct accountability and blame immediately and entirely to the top policy levels as was the case in the Netherlands after the Srebrenica massacre

There are also other strategies for coping with the period between announcing an inquiry and the much awaited results (or no inquiry at all); such as, announcing preemptive reforms even as accountability debates (and inquiries) are still being pursued. Crisis researchers are divided over the level of learning that can be expected and achieved in relation to crises and whether this can be the basis for real reform and change. However, announcing change and reform can be as much a political tool as a policy tool. In the ministerial careers studied in this book, political statements often included comments about important changes and measures for improvement. Such measures are often less substantial and often minor organizational adjustments; for instance, reshuffling cabinet positions, changing the mandate of organizations, and reorganizing targeted agencies. It would be valuable to further substantiate the effects of these early measures. Are 'pre-emptive reforms' effective in de-escalating blame levels over time and are they long-lasting?

Finally, there are a number of strategies that utilize various forms of apologies (in full or in part) and the importance of choosing the right one for the right occasion. Several of the cases show clear differences in how apologies have affected where blame was placed. As a mechanism to mitigate criticism from the political opposition it worked well. Generous public apologies (e.g., Finland and Norway after the tsunami) by the incumbent and the recognition of their own failures had a cushioning effect on the debate. Proactive, unforced government self-criticism (symbolic as much as substantial) robbed the opposition of the opportunity to attack. Similar effects were found in the other studies. The prisoner abuse scandals in the US and Britain involved poignant high-stake decisions harboring ethical challenges that became the focus of the post-crisis accountability processes, similar to that of the tsunami crisis. Incumbent policy makers had to account for these perceived ethical violations during the post-crisis phase. Factors of 'proportionality' and 'timing' in assuming responsibility and apologizing were significant to the outcomes of the blame games in the both crisis events.

Now, after this discussion about applying blaming strategies, our attention is given to reflecting upon the underlying conceptual model and the methods employed in the current research effort.

8.4 Methodological choices and limitations

In this section, the discussion is returned to some of the pros and cons of the methodological choices made in this book. As lessons were learned in the early studies (chapters 4 and 5), it became clear that information on the context of specific events had to be factored in, a gap identified in other blame management studies as well (Hansen et al., 2013; Kuipers and't Hart, 2014). An additional

perspective rooted in the ministerial and cabinet tenure literature was therefore added and applied. The results were better than expected, and looking back it seemed obvious that the analysis was deepened when contextual information was given more consideration. These factors are part of the context and focus on the characteristics of the individual decision-makers and the political/institutional arrangement that can both enable and constrain decision-makers' responses. They are relevant in determining blaming behavior and strategies in a given situation. Ministerial tenure studies typically have applied more quantitative, statistical methods to a large sample of cases. These methods increase the reliability of the results compared to those using more qualitatively oriented methods applied to accountability and blame management studies. Introducing these variables required careful consideration of methodological implications and study design.

Despite the methodological challenges, it was a worthwhile attempt. By being able to identify and control more of the environment in which blaming processes and strategies develop, the validity and reliability of the results should increase. The drawback was that the depth in analyzing the particular steps and relations over time within the blaming process had to be reduced to and focused only on a few key actors, arenas, and opponents. For future studies, variable-centered small to medium -N case studies according to a co-variational approach would be valuable. By controlling more of the contextual variables, specific factors or mechanisms found to be relevant in the probing design applied in this dissertation could be tested with the aim to substantiate their relevance to outcomes. The step taken to forge crisis accountability, blame management, and ministerial tenure research is the most important outcome of this research endeavor. The successful use of the model applied in the two last chapters is an indication that these separate perspectives on post-crisis accountability and their effects could benefit greatly from each other.

The methodological challenges of performing research on relations and interchangeable processes like crisis-induced accountability management remain a challenge. When performing in-depth case studies based on process-tracing methods, content analysis is a relevant method and frequently used. In the two last chapters of this book the number of cases was increased and thereby it became much more difficult to operationalize a manageable coding scheme that would be sensitive enough to interpret the variables related to behavior and process. This is an area of methodological consideration that should and needs to be developed further.

Ministerial tenure research provides a framework that can potentially fill gaps in the accountability and blame management literature. This strand of literature considers all types of resignations, whereas accountability and blame management studies consider only a subset of high-profile 'resignation events' (unrelated to the personal lives of ministers or party-induced reshuffling). These studies are generally performed through statistical methods with a large number of cases. Therefore, ministerial tenure literature can provide credible indications

of contextual variables regarding concern cabinet members and ministers that should be of relevance also to blame management studies in attempting to clarify the outcomes and efficacy of certain strategies.

Throughout this research endeavor, the case selection was challenging. What is a real 'crisis' case? In the end the criteria to select the cases was identified and successfully served its purpose. However, for future research the selection criteria should be revisited and reassessed. As the nature of crisis and the perception of crisis develop simultaneously and by completely different critical junctures and factors, the notion of a national crisis event will need to be considered carefully. In the research conducted for this book, the functional perspective of crisis was separated from the symbolic/political aspect, and therefore personal scandals perceived as national crisis events were not included. In reality these types of crises are becoming increasingly topics of public discussion.

8.5 Reflections: Looking back and looking ahead

Looking back at the aim of this dissertation and the research question posed, I conclude that I have learned more about the politics of crisis accountability and its actors but also about institutions and social relations that are much more than just the backdrop to these events. Over the course of the past 10 years I have studied these events and the people involved in them, and the world around them has changed a lot. When I embarked on this research path it was driven by a pure interest in understanding more about blame games, crisis management, and how top policy makers engage in both.

The conceptual model was developed to incorporate staged and relational responses that develop and change within complex processes of accountability, much like the political and social processes of today's societies. The increasing cross-boundary (sectoral and geographical) character of crises — the speed with which risks and threats travel, the growing medialization, and the immediate flow of information — require crisis management and accountability management to be even more flexible, fast, and open to scrutiny. Therefore I believe that future research into these events and processes should continue to focus on the situational and relational aspects but they also need to be much more careful in describing the contexts in which they are evolving.

One thing that has changed less over these 10 years is the people involved in these processes. Top policy and political actors, and the institutions they belong to, still have to comprehend their surroundings and ways to interact. Even though the core of the top polity is repeatedly changing and new management schools and traditions implemented, the pace of change in their surroundings seems greater.

Looking ahead I expect that the pressure on leaders and leadership when coping with crisis-induced accountability management will increase; before, during and after a crisis there will be increasingly more scrutiny and greater (diverse) public expectations. This will affect how crises, accountability, and blame are managed

and the strategies used. From a research point of view, continued focus should be placed on the multiplicity of arenas and channels and the complexity and synchronicity in where these actors can engage in order to understand accountability processes. If politics and policy were in the past only for the privileged and performed with little openness, that world is long gone. The performance of politics, especially during dramatic and extraordinary events such as crises, is of great public interest. Therefore, it is closely followed, watched, and assessed by all layers of society, and information technology quickly provides details. Consequently, expectations on societal institutions and leaders to be able to explain and remedy failures are expected to increase. So, the future relevance of studying crisis accountability management through multi-variable models and comparative case studies remains high. There are several other areas for future research agendas that should and can make a meaningful contribution. Here I present just five of them which I feel can build upon and enrich the work presented here.

First, future studies could test the coupling between variation in causality (external/internal) and variation in outcomes by asking a number of significant questions. Are top policy makers more likely to resign as a consequence of crisis accountability if causality is established as internal? And which strategies are applied, or should be, when the framing of causes (internal versus external) is changed?

Secondly, a revised set of propositions could examine further the efficacy of blame management strategies as a function of the actors who employ them, their opponents, audiences, and the arenas in which they are effectuated. This may also include comparing the effectiveness of particular strategies between different subsets of crises; for instance, personal scandals and national crises.

Thirdly, the 'history' and pre-crisis credibility of the actors involved in crisis accountability processes should be examined further. A subquestion of interest is whether high political capital prior to a crisis event has a shielding effect and if so to what extent. It is possible that prior calls for resignation due to personal scandals will affect a minister's success in staying in office when a new crisis has occurred in his/her portfolio.

Fourthly, whether gender influences the choice of blame management strategies and arenas should be tested and substantiated. Are women and men approaching blame management the same way? Are there any differences in how interaction in arenas plays out and consequently differences in reported outcomes? Are there differences in how women and men are perceived and succeed when they engage in accountability discussions in various types of crises (for instance, national security, natural disasters, financial and social security crises)?

Finally, the growth of informal and public accountability forums outside of the traditional arenas (parliament, hearings, etc.) cannot be disregarded. It deserves greater attention in crisis accountability as well as ministerial tenure research. For instance, how much of the public understanding of crisis events and judgements about responsibility and failures are shaped in the social media?

Instant access and engagement of social media actors are speeding up the pace and pressure of the accountability debate, and consequently the window for being part of this discussion and being able to actively shape understandings and narratives is likely to become more limited.

For practitioners looking ahead, the results are both positive and potentially negative. On the positive end, crisis-induced accountability processes are open to engagement and can be influenced. Key actors have potentially a lot of say in how events are evaluated and how narratives develop. To be able to have that kind of influence, the findings here recommend that practitioners make an effort of being open and responsive to the needs and expectations of their audiences when coping with crisis events and accountability management. It is important to distinguish between causality and responsibility frames but at the same time realize that they need to be managed and addressed simultaneously.

Decision-makers are better off when they have skills, routines, and organizations that can cope with a crisis environment that has a high tempo, open (and freely accessible) information, and immediate evaluation through a variety of arenas and channels. Crisis and accountability management structures need to be proactive and flexible, and crisis managers need to be engaged and honest and (in the best of worlds) also produce a good track record. The increasing demands on practitioners to fulfill all of these virtues and tasks might be a task too great; they are only human. Consequently, supporting structures will need to be developed and invested in long before a crisis erupts. It needs to be continuously trained and kept alert to the multiplicity of the interaction between actors on various arenas that have stakes in accountability processes. In the opening chapter of this book, I posed a question if it mattered "who" was employing accountability strategies. The answer to this important question still remains "yes".

The results of the studies in this book clearly point to the fact that actors, arenas and forums and their interrelationships are key in managing accountability pressure in the post-crisis phase.

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Executive summary

What accountability demands on political office-holders are triggered by crisis events and how are they managed?

When crisis events lead to high politics the stakes and consequences for public office-holders, in particular responsible ministers are high. Perceived failures to prevent and to manage crisis effectively can lead to intense accountability processes and blaming tactics by top political actors. Some crisis events are treated as 'normal incidents' that are bound to occur in a vast and complex array of governmental activities. Others spark a blaze of media attention, public emotions, and political upheaval. A common feature is that nearly all of these events and disturbances affecting core societal functions are increasingly deemed intolerable by key stakeholders, the media, and the public at large, and thus are often considered to be social, political or institutional 'crises' (Kuipers and 't Hart, 2014).

Crises can have different triggers that shape how they are perceived and responded to. They can be triggered by unforeseen events and natural disasters; for example, the tsunami in South East Asia in 2004, floods and forest fires that regularly strike certain parts of the world, or by the deliberate acts with intentions to do harm such as 9/11 and the recent terror attacks in Paris and Copenhagen. But they can also be triggered by internal factors within technological, administrative and political systems. Examples include the technical breakdowns associated with the Deep Water Horizon accident in the Gulf of Mexico 2010, the failing regulatory policies that fueled the economic crisis in 2008, and political conflicts and scandals. Crisis management thus takes on different characteristics depending on whether crisis events are approached from an institutional/organizational, policy, or political perspective. Besides the fact that crises can be managed on different 'levels', there are also other dimensions that influence crisis events and the accountability processes that follow depending on whether the crises appear to have been caused by external or internal factors. These differences are significant. They will determine who will be pointed out as guilty and where blame will be directed. Furthermore, they will require different types of engagement and strategies by those involved in managing accountability processes.

Crisis-induced accountability processes focus on three key dimensions and questions. Firstly, the *origins* of the crisis: how could this have happened in the first place? Was this a result of a malfunctioning system, bad decisions or policies, or was it an unforeseen 'act of god'. Secondly, the *responses* to the crisis: did "we"/"they" do enough and were the actions appropriate and swift enough once the crisis had hit full force? Did the responsible authorities take proper action and did the involved agencies perform satisfactorily under pressure? And thirdly, what should be *learned* from this event: what political and policy implications should it have?

Combining crisis and blame management literature to understand accountability processes

This study presents a central research question that is: *what accountability demands on political office-holders are triggered by crisis events, how do they manage such demands, and what implications does this have for their political survival?* Different fields of research have focused on answering different questions and therefore developed their own lenses and perspectives to understanding the mechanisms of crisis and blame management. This study demonstrates that findings from blame management literature and ministerial tenure literature can be fruitfully combined and mutually beneficial to theory development.

A synthetic framework is presented here has been developed in two parts. The first part of the framework, the conceptual model applied in chapters 4 and 5, deals with presentational strategies and is represented in the form of a "blaming tree" (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). The dimensions capture clusters of questions pertaining to specific aspects that are important for the analysis. The first case studies (chapters 4 and 5) demonstrate that the presentational strategies that ministers choose to apply will depend on their perception of 1) how bad the situation is (severity), 2) what or who caused the problem; depicting events as operational incidents or as symptoms of endemic problems (agency and causality) and 3) who should be held responsible; that is, depicting events as caused by a single actor or by 'many hands' (responsibility) (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). When performing the latter studies of ministerial resignations in Sweden and the Netherlands (chapters 6 and 7) the initial model was extended to increase sensitivity to contextual factors such as the particular political landscape and the division of power in parliament and cabinet. These are significant factors and the study show that they are influential to the success or failure of particular blame strategies. By including this perspective important information on the ability of individual decision-makers to actually perform certain strategies and gain support for their proposed narratives were accessed.

Investigating staged blaming processes

This study presents four comparative case studies, which examine a small to medium number of cases. Each of the four empirical chapters deals with separate but closely linked questions regarding how blaming processes evolve and the responses to crisis-induced accountability processes.

Chapter 4 "The politics of tsunami responses: comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia"[134] offers a comparative view of the different

134 This chapter was first published as: Brändström, Annika, Sanneke Kuipers, and Pär Daleus (2008) "The politics of tsunami responses: comparing patterns of blame management in Scandinavia." In *Governing After Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning*, edited by Arjen Boin, Allan McConnell and Paul 't Hart. Cambridge University Press.

meaning-making strategies used to frame blame by the governments of Sweden, Norway and Finland after the tsunami in Southeast Asia on Boxing Day 2004. The responses and interaction between by the three governments, key ministers and their opponents in this external crisis event are discussed. In chapter 5: "Chasing evil, defending atrocities: Blame avoidance and prisoner abuse during the war in Iraq"[135] the same analytical approach as chapter 4 was applied but to an internal event that implicated the entire U.S and British governments during the Iraqi war. The findings from these two chapters show that the accountability process and blaming patterns are different when actors respond to external or internal crisis events and it gives us a better understanding of how the often politicized crisis-induced accountability processes are formed.

Chapter 6: "Crisis, accountability, blame management and ministerial careers: the Netherlands"[136] focuses on the outcome of crisis-induced accountability processes in various types of events in one political/administrative system with a tradition of coalition governments. Chapter 7: "Crisis, accountability, blame management and ministerial careers: Sweden"[137] is a continuation in testing the applicability of the conceptual model in examining outcomes of crisis-induced accountability processes in various types of events within one political/administrative system with a tradition of single-party governments. The findings of chapters 6 and 7 give a better understanding of the contextual and personal factors that influence the success or failure of particular meaning-making strategies. It is an important complement in understanding blame management and consequences to political careers.

When are blaming strategies used?

This study shows that blame management strategies are used to deflect, shape, and direct the attribution of blame to avoid being sanctioned. The need to attribute blame occurs when members of accountability forums – journalists, parliamentarians, investigators, web communities - feel that a major negative event has occurred and that someone should take responsibility for it. Crisis-induced accountability pressure appears when it is established that something blameworthy has happened in relation to a crisis; a perception that crucial values have been

135 This chapter was first published as: Kuipers, Sanneke, Kasia Kochanska, and Annika Brändström (2011) "Chasing evil, defending atrocities: Blame avoidance and prisoner abuse during the war in Iraq." In *Ethics and Crisis Management*, edited by Lina Svedin. Information Age Publishing.

136 This chapter was first published as: Brändström, Annika and Marij Swinkels (2015) "Crisis accountability and career management in the Netherlands" In *Organizing After Crisis*, edited by Nathalie Schiffino, Laurent Taskin, Celine Donis, and Julien Raone. Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing Group.

137 This chapter was first published as: Brändström Annika (2015) "Crisis accountability and ministerial resignations in Sweden." *Scandinavian Political Studies*. Volume 38, Issue 3: 217–320.

threatened and that the responsible authorities have been unwilling, incapable, or otherwise ineffective in addressing these threats. Thereafter, the process of accountability management tends to evolve through a number of discussions and take place in different forums – formal and informal, as well as technical, legal and political ones. Cabinet ministers are increasingly held responsible for policy failures, departmental errors, personal errors and failure to perform. The prime minister, in turn, is held responsible for the overall coherence, competence, and credibility of the government.

In the case studies we can see that an important initial activity for incumbent policymakers is to position themselves in relation to what caused the event. The most important distinction is between framing causality as caused by internal (policy/political) or external (operational or others) f (actors). If problems are perceived to have been initiated by factors from 'within' the polity, bad/rotten policy, failed internal processes, poor decision-making, lack of oversight, or failure to keep the public and Parliament informed according to procedures, there is a good chance that political actors will be perceived as having in part caused the crisis. This study shows that framing of causality and responsibility involves developing parallel narratives. Attempts to influence/manipulate perceptions of both causality and responsibility can be effective in shaping how the politicization process develops to assign responsibility and blame.

In this book I compared crisis-induced accountability processes in the Netherlands and Sweden, which represents different political traditions of coalition versus single-party governments. In the accountability processes studied in the Netherlands we could see that often the political leadership took on responsibility because "someone had to," perhaps with mixed motives. In the Swedish cases set in a context of a majority of single-party governments there is more variation. The administrative culture of collective decision-making is often mentioned in discussions about political responsibility as a function that would diffuse responsibility. Even so, in the cases where ministers resigned, the dominant framing of both causality and responsibility were clearly centered on a single, identifiable top office-holder. This study that there was no shielding effect through the collective decision-making argument when the focus was on internal causes. In the study of the Netherlands, we see that crises were more often framed as the result of mistakes and missed signals in otherwise functional policy systems. The fact that crisis accountability processes were managed in a coalition government setting made internal party-politics less visible and the outcomes did not affect the political capital of the governments. Causality was typically framed as system failures and mistakes, outside direct government involvement and therefore had little political consequences. These outcomes might be understood in the context of single-party governments being more susceptible to critique from the opposition on the performance of individual ministers since there is a real opportunity to lower the political capital of the incumbent government and change the electoral support.

The findings demonstrate that different strategies are linked with various outcomes. The outcomes can generate a wide range of results: from scapegoating, containing the crisis on a lower political level (as exemplified in chapters 5 and 7), sanctioning operational organizations, and making adjustments to rules and procedures (see chapters 4 and 6). The most politically explosive outcome is defined as a product of errors performed by top policy makers over a longer period of time (which we saw in chapter 4). From a policy and institutional perspective the most dramatic outcome would be evidence of fundamentally flawed systems of policy making and operations. None of the crisis events examined in this book resulted in such an extreme.

By "whom" and "where" are blame management strategies most effective?

This study also raised the question of how accountability processes affect the political survival of the incumbent policy makers who have to manage blame. The findings here, and documented elsewhere, underline the significance that context has on the choice and effectiveness of various strategies. In some situations, certain strategies are simply not available or appropriate. The findings suggest that current political power appeared to exceed prior mistakes. In addition, closeness to the prime minister (position in the party) was relevant as a shielding effect if a minister was involved in a crisis. In the Swedish cases, it appeared that being a member of a single-party cabinet entailed a higher risk of being reshuffled by the prime minister as a response to crisis accountability. Political experience is likely to be important in maneuvering crisis situations in a political setting yet it is not clear how this alone helped any of the ministers who were examined in the crisis cases. The two last empirical chapters document and provide evidence for the finding that it does matter 'who' the actors are in terms of their political positions in the party or their prior experiences and seniority from previous cabinets .

Turning to the most influential institutional factors, the informal accountability structures within a cabinet are more important than formal accountability structures within the parliament in explaining resignations due to crisis accountability. For instance, in the resignation cases in Sweden it was the risk that the mistakes by individual ministers would spill over and risk the continued work of the cabinet as a whole and continued public support that was the driving force behind the prime ministers decision to let individual ministers go. It was very rarely claims from Parliament that by itself led to the termination of a minister's career. Other informal accountability actors, such as the traditional media and the growing role of social media, require other interaction and responses. We saw many examples of innovative use of other means of instant and quick communication of messages and framing critical situations in some of the Dutch cases that we studied.

Reflecting on the performing of blaming strategies and their effectiveness

With regards to the performance of applying strategies and their effectiveness I found that responsiveness and openness are the two most important elements of applying strategies that can have a powerful effect on how well blame can be managed. In almost all the studies included in this book, opponents, the public and the media gave positive feedback to those individuals who were active, open, and willing to participate in the crisis response and in debates on discussing the possible causes and culprits. However, this active interest and involvement had to appear sincere; if it was perceived as an attempt to manipulate or cover-up something then it only increased criticism and lowered credibility.

One significant aspect of choosing such a strategy has to do with externalizing or accepting accountability. There is the choice to push blame down or outside of one's own realm or to accept responsibility. When analyzing the cases in this book, it was clear that it is rarely a good idea to "blame anyone directly beneath you", for instance the tsunami case where the prime minister blamed the foreign office. For governments and politicians it always backlashed when they publicly stated that an agency or a less senior minister should take responsibility. This finding was evident in all of the studies.

Another established strategy is to assign inquiries and high-level investigations, which is a common scheme used by policy makers and politicians to address negative events. By focusing on the factual events, reforms, and suggestions for improvement, it is generally believed that accountability can be assigned in a controlled way and therefore avoid heated blame games with more or less success (see Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2010). In the studies here it was evident that initiated inquiries had only a temporary effect on lowering the intensity of accountability and blame debates.

Finally, there are a number of strategies that utilize various forms of apologies (in full or in part) and the importance of choosing the right one for the right occasion. Several of the cases show clear differences in how apologies have affected where blame was placed. As a mechanism to mitigate criticism from the political opposition and as a cushioning effect, it worked well in the Scandinavian countries after the tsunami. In the prisoner abuse scandals in US and Britain, cases which harbored ethical challenges, incumbent policy makers had to balance these perceived ethical violations and factors of 'proportionality' and 'timing' in assuming responsibility and apologizing were significant to the outcomes.

A program for further research

The pressures on leaders and leadership with regards to crisis-induced accountability management is not likely to diminish; before, during and after a crisis there will most likely be more scrutiny and greater (diverse) public expectations. This

will affect how crisis, accountability, and blame are managed and the strategies used. From a research point of view, continued focus should be placed on the multiplicity of arenas and channels and the complexity and synchronicity in where these actors can engage in order to understand accountability processes. If politics and policy were in the past only for the privileged and performed with little openness, that world is long gone. The performance of politics, especially during dramatic and extraordinary events such as crises, is of great public interest. Consequently, expectations on societal institutions and leaders to be able to explain and remedy failures are expected to increase. So, the future relevance of studying crisis accountability management through multi-variable models and comparative case studies remains high. I particularly point out five areas on which future research could focus attention.

First, testing the coupling between variation in causality (external/internal) and variation in outcomes were done by asking a number of significant questions. Are top policy makers more likely to resign as a consequence of crisis accountability if causality is established as internal? And which strategies are applicable when the causes are perceived as internal versus external?

Secondly, examine further the efficacy of blame management strategies as a function of the actors who employ them, their opponents, audiences, and the arenas in which they are effectuated. This may also include comparing the effectiveness of particular strategies between different subsets of crises; for instance, personal scandals and national crises.

Thirdly, the 'history' and pre-crisis credibility of the actors involved in crisis accountability processes should be examined further. A subquestion of interest is whether high political capital prior to a crisis event has a shielding effect and if so to what extent.

Fourthly, whether gender influences the choice of blame management strategies and arenas should be tested and substantiated. Are women and men approaching blame management the same way? Are there differences in how women and men are perceived and succeed when they engage in accountability discussions in various types of crises (for instance, national security, natural disasters, financial and social security crises)?

Finally, the growth of informal and public accountability forums outside of the traditional arenas (parliament, hearings, etc.) cannot be disregarded. It deserves greater attention in crisis accountability as well as ministerial tenure research. For instance, how much of the public understanding of crisis events and judgements about responsibility and failures are shaped in the social media? Instant access and engagement of social media actors are speeding up the pace and pressure of the accountability debate, and consequently the window for being part of this discussion become more limited.

Practical recommendations to policymakers

For practitioners, the results of this research are both positive and potentially negative. On the positive end, crisis-induced accountability processes are open to engagement and can be influenced. Key actors have potentially a lot of say in how events are evaluated and how narratives develop. To be able to have that kind of influence, the findings here recommend that practitioners make an effort of being open and responsive to the needs and expectations of their audiences. It is important to distinguish between causality and responsibility frames but at the same time realize that they need to be managed and addressed simultaneously.

Decision-makers are better off when they have skills, routines, and organizations that can cope with a crisis environment that has a high tempo, open (and freely accessible) information, and immediate evaluation through a variety of arenas and channels. Crisis and accountability management structures need to be proactive and flexible, and crisis managers need to be engaged and honest and (in the best of worlds) also produce a good track record. The increasing demands on practitioners to fulfill all of these virtues and tasks might be a task too great; they are only human. Consequently, supporting structures will need to be developed and invested in long before a crisis erupts. It needs to be continuously trained and kept alert to the multiplicity of the interaction between actors on various arenas that have stakes in accountability processes.

Key words: blame management, blame avoidance, crisis, accountability, presentational strategies, political office-holders, crisis-induced, Sweden, Netherlands, case studies, ministerial career.

Samenvatting in het Nederlands

Welke verantwoordingseisen stelt een crisis aan bewindspersonen en hoe gaan zij hiermee om?

Wanneer een crisis leidt tot hoge politieke druk, zijn de consequenties voor de verantwoordelijke bewindspersonen vaak onzeker. Fouten in het voorkomen en efficiënt managen van een crisis kunnen leiden tot zware verantwoordingsprocessen en tot allerlei tactieken van bewindspersonen om de schuld af te schuiven. Sommige crises worden gezien als 'normale incidenten', die logischerwijs kunnen optreden in de complexiteit van overheidsactiviteiten. Andere crises veroorzaken een golf aan media aandacht, publieke emotie en politieke omwentelingen. Een gemeenschappelijke component van crises en maatschappelijke onrust betreft de trend dat betrokken actoren – de media en het publiek – de oorzaken en politieke gevolgen van incidenten steeds minder tolereren. Incidenten worden daarmee steeds vaker gezien als een sociale, politieke, of institutionele crisis (Kuipers en 't Hart, 2014).

Crisis management verandert vaak van vorm, afhankelijk van het perspectief waarmee naar de crisis wordt gekeken. Daarbij kan een onderscheid worden gemaakt in een institutioneel, een beleids-, of een politiek perspectief. Naast het feit dat crises vanuit verschillende benaderingen gemanaged kunnen worden, oefenen ook andere dimensies kracht uit op crises en de processen van verantwoording die daarop volgen.

Een voorbeeld hiervan is de vraag of de oorzaak van de crisis wordt gezien als intern of extern. Crises hebben verschillende oorzaken, die voor een deel gevolgen hebben voor de omgang met en de afhandeling van de crisis. Crises kunnen worden veroorzaakt door niet voorziene gebeurtenissen en natuurrampen; bijvoorbeeld de tsunami in Zuid-Oost Azië in 2004, hevige overstromingen en bosbranden in Amerikaanse staten, of door menselijk handelen met doelbewuste intenties zoals de aanvallen op 9/11, en meer recent de aanvallen in Parijs en Kopenhagen. Daarnaast zijn vaak ook interne factoren te onderscheiden binnen technische, administratieve, en politieke systemen. Voorbeelden hiervan zijn de ramp met boorplatform 'Deepwater Horizon' in de Golf van Mexico in 2010, het falende systeem van toezicht op de financiële markten in 2008, en politieke conflicten en schandalen.

De verschillen in de benadering van verantwoordingsvragen zijn aanzienlijk. Verschillen in crisisperceptie bepalen wie wordt aangewezen als de schuldige en waar de *blame game*[138] gespeeld wordt. Het vraagt om verschillende manieren van betrokkenheid en verschillende strategieën van degenen die betrokken worden in het verantwoordingsproces.

138 Letterlijk: het spel der schuld

Door crises veroorzaakte verantwoordingsprocessen richten zich op drie dimensies en daarbij horende vragen. Allereerst het *ontstaan* van de crisis: hoe heeft dit in de eerste plaats kunnen gebeuren? Is het incident de uitkomst van een systeem dat niet naar behoren functioneert? Slechte beslissingen en slecht beleid? Of toch een onvoorziene 'act of god'? De tweede dimensie richt zich op de *reacties* op de crisis: hebben 'we' genoeg gedaan? Was de respons afdoende en goed genoeg toen de crisis echt toesloeg? Hebben de verantwoordelijke autoriteiten voldoende actie ondernomen en hebben de betrokken instanties en actoren naar voldoening gepresteerd onder de druk van de crisis? De laatste dimensie richt zich op het *leren* van de crisis: welke politieke en beleidsimplicaties heeft de crisis?

Crisis management en 'blame management' literatuur combineren om verantwoordingsprocessen te begrijpen

Dit onderzoek beantwoordt de volgende onderzoeksvraag: *welke verantwoordingsvragen veroorzaken crises voor bewindspersonen, hoe gaan bewindspersonen hier vervolgens mee om, en welke implicaties hebben deze strategieën voor de overlevingskansen van een bewindspersoon?* Om het antwoord te vinden op deze vraag zijn twee stromingen uit de literatuur bij elkaar gebracht, die over politieke verantwoordelijkheid en die over crisis management. Beide wetenschappelijke domeinen kijken op een andere manier, met andere lenzen en perspectieven, naar het begrip 'blame management'. Het onderzoek laat zien dat de 'blame management' literatuur en de ministeriële verantwoordingsliteratuur kunnen worden gecombineerd om verantwoordingsvragen rondom crises verder te beantwoorden.

Een tweedelig theoretisch kader is ontworpen om het onderzoek naar verantwoordingsvraagstukken na crises uit te voeren. Het eerste deel van dit theoretisch kader is het conceptuele model dat zich richt op presentatie strategieën van bewindspersonen en is weergegeven in een 'blaming tree' (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). Deze 'blaming tree' richt zich op verschillende dimensies van presentatie strategieën. De eerste casus onderzoeken (hoofdstukken vier en vijf) laten zien dat presentatie strategieën die ministers toe passen afhankelijk zijn van 1) de hevigheid van de situatie en 2) de oorzaak van het probleem (het afschilderen van de gebeurtenis als operationeel falen of als een aanhoudend probleem – causaliteit) en 3) de spreiding van verantwoordelijkheid (toebedelen aan een uniforme actor of definiëren als een probleem van vele handen) (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003). In de onderzoeken naar ministerieel aftreden in Zweden en Nederland (hoofdstukken zes en zeven) is het conceptuele model uitgebreid met meer contextuele factoren zoals het politieke klimaat en de verdeling van machtsrelaties binnen het parlement en de regering. De onderzoeken laten zien dat deze onderscheidende factoren invloed hebben op het succes of falen van bepaalde 'blame' strategieën. Het invoegen van een contextueel perspectief

geeft belangrijke informatie over de mogelijkheden van individuele actoren om daadwerkelijk bepaalde strategieën toe te kunnen passen en daar support voor te krijgen.

Het onderzoeken van het script van verantwoordingsprocessen

In dit boek worden vier vergelijkende casus onderzoeken gepresenteerd, die zich allemaal richten op een klein tot medium aantal cases per onderzoek. De theoretische omvang van de studie is breder en draagt bij aan bestaande kennis over door crisis veroorzaakte verantwoordingsprocessen en de potentiële consequenties daarvan voor bewindspersonen en regeringen. Elk van de vier empirische hoofdstukken adresseert een andere vraag in relatie tot het hoofdthema: de ontwikkeling van en reactie op 'blaming' processen.

Hoofdstuk 4 "de politiek van reacties op de tsunami: het vergelijken van patronen van 'blame management' in Scandinavië" geeft een vergelijkend beeld van verschillende strategieën van betekenisgeving aan de crisis veroorzaakt door de Tsunami in Zuid-Oost Azië op tweede kerstdag in 2004. Deze natuurramp was voor de Scandinavische landen een crisis omdat zich op dat moment tienduizenden toeristen in de getroffen regio bevonden. Hierbij wordt gekeken naar de manier waarop de overheden van Zweden, Noorwegen en Finland met de crisisrespons en de schuldvraag om zijn gegaan. In hoofdstuk 5: "Jagen op het kwaad en verdedigen van wreedheden: Schuldvermijding en misbruik van gevangenen gedurende de oorlog in Irak" wordt hetzelfde analytische framework toegepast als in hoofdstuk 4, maar ditmaal gericht op een *interne* crisis waarbij de Amerikaanse en Britse regeringen betrokken waren gedurende de Irakoorlog. De bevindingen van deze twee hoofdstukken laten zien dat verantwoordingsprocessen en 'schuldpatronen' verschillende vormen aannemen wanneer actoren reageren op een interne of een externe crisis. Daarbij geven de bevindingen inzicht in de escalatie van door crisis veroorzaakte verantwoordingsprocessen.

Hoofdstuk 6, "Crisis, verantwoording, schuld en ministeriële carrières in Nederland" richt zich op de uitkomsten van door crisis veroorzaakte verantwoordingsprocessen na verschillende type crises in een politiek-administratief systeem met een lange traditie van coalitiekabinetten. Hoofdstuk 7: "Crisis, verantwoording, schuld en ministeriële carrières in Zweden" volgt op hoofdstuk 6 en test de toepassing van het conceptuele model op de uitkomsten van door crisis veroorzaakte verantwoordingsprocessen na verschillende type crises in een politiek-administratief systeem met een lange traditie van eenheidsregeringen. De bevindingen in hoofdstuk 6 en 7 geven een beeld van de rol die contextuele factoren en persoonlijke kenmerken van bewindspersonen spelen in het succes of falen van bepaalde strategieën van betekenisgeving en verantwoording. Dat is een belangrijke aanvulling op de wetenschappelijke kennis rondom 'blame management'.

Wanneer worden schuld strategieën gebruikt?

Dit onderzoek laat zien dat *blame management strategies* worden ingezet om schuld op een bepaalde manier vorm te geven, toe te delen aan anderen, of om sancties te ontwijken. De behoefte om schuld toe te delen ontstaat wanneer deelnemers aan een forum van verantwoording – journalisten, parlementariërs, onderzoekers, online communities – het gevoel hebben dat een groot incident heeft plaatsgevonden met negatieve gevolgen waar iemand de verantwoordelijkheid voor moet dragen. Druk ontstaat zodra de fora hebben vastgesteld dat iets laakbaars heeft plaatsgevonden in relatie tot de crisis: het geloof dat cruciale waarden bedreigd worden en dat de verantwoordelijke autoriteiten onwelwillend, incapabel of ineffectief hebben gereageerd op deze groeiende druk. Vervolgens hebben deze processen de neiging om te ontaarden in een groot aantal debatten en discussies in verschillende – zowel formele als informele – technische, juridische of politieke fora. Ministers worden vaak verantwoordelijk gehouden voor beleidsfalen, departementale organisatiefouten, persoonlijke misstappen en falen in de uitvoering van hun werk. De premier wordt op zijn beurt verantwoordelijk gehouden voor de overkoepelende samenhang, competenties en geloofwaardigheid van zijn kabinet.

In de case studies is terug te zien dat de manier waarop beleidsmakers zich positioneren in relatie tot de crisis belangrijk is. Cruciaal is daarbij het framen van oorzakelijke verbanden van de crisissituatie als interne (beleid of politiek) of externe factoren. Een extern frame houdt in dat bewindspersonen op een geloofwaardige manier moeten claimen dat de situatie in kwestie wellicht niet te voorzien was, maar zeker niet te voorkomen was door middel van preventie en controle. Dit wordt ook uitgelegd in de eerste dimensie van de *blaming tree* (figure 2.2). Wanneer de oorzakelijke verbanden die leiden tot een crisis gelinkt kunnen worden aan problemen of falen buiten het politieke spectrum (bijvoorbeeld door private bedrijven, NGO's, internationale organisaties) of aan het handelen van lagere uitvoerende niveaus (agentschappen of onderaannemers van de overheid), dan voeren vragen over waar verantwoordelijkheid zou moeten liggen de boventoon voeren. De case studies laten zien dat wanneer de oorzakelijke verbanden die leiden tot een crisis worden toegedicht aan externe factoren, dat verantwoordingsframes er heel anders uit kunnen zien.

Wanneer incidenten worden begrepen vanuit een interne causaliteitsredenatie (slecht beleid, gefaalde interne processen, slechte besluitvorming, gebrek aan overzicht, gebrek aan informatievoorziening aan parlement of de samenleving), dan is de kans groot dat politieke actoren geheel of ten dele zullen worden gezien als veroorzakers van de crisis. Het wordt dan erg lastig om een *narrative* van verantwoording en verantwoordelijkheid te vormen dat zich richt op actoren buiten het politieke spectrum of op een ander politiek niveau. In dit onderzoek vertonen het framen van causaliteit en verantwoordingsvragen parallelle verhaallijnen. Pogingen om percepties van causaliteit en verantwoording te beïnvloeden kunnen effectief zijn in het politiseringsproces dat zich ontvouwt en waar schuld

en verantwoordelijkheid worden toebedeeld. Als incidenten verder politiseren dan is de kans dat verantwoording en schuld meebewegen op de hiërarchische ladder groter (zie Boin et al, 2009).

In dit boek zijn door crises veroorzaakte verantwoordingsprocessen in Nederland en Zweden onderzocht. Deze twee landen representeren verschillende politieke tradities van coalitiekabinetten en eenheidsregeringen. Uit de bestudeerde verantwoordingsprocessen in Nederland wordt duidelijk dat de bewindspersonen verantwoordelijkheid nemen omdat 'iemand het moest doen', zij het met gemixte motieven. In de Zweedse studie lijkt meer variatie zichtbaar. De ambtelijke cultuur van gezamenlijke besluitvorming wordt daar vaak aangehaald in discussies over politieke verantwoordelijkheid als een functie die verantwoordelijkheid verspreidt.

In zaken waar de bewindspersonen aftreden lijkt het dominante frame rondom causaliteit en verantwoording zich te richten op uniforme, duidelijk identificeerbare bewindspersonen. De studie laat zien dat door de heersende cultuur van gezamenlijke besluitvorming geen afwenteling van de schuld mogelijk is wanneer de oorzaak wordt gezocht bij interne oorzaken van de crisis. In het onderzoek gericht op de Nederlandse verantwoordingsprocessen zien we dat crises vaker geframed worden als fouten en gemiste signalen in anders goed functionerende beleidssystemen.

Het feit dat na crisis verantwoordingsprocessen gemanaged worden in een coalitieregering maakt interne partijpolitiek minder zichtbaar en de uitkomsten van de *blame contests* lijken daar minder van invloed te zijn op het politiek kapitaal van de regering. Causaliteit wordt in coalitieregeringen vaker geframed als systeem-falen, dat buiten de directe invloed van de overheid ligt en daardoor weinig politieke consequenties tot gevolg heeft. Deze uitkomsten kunnen wellicht terug te brengen zijn tot de conclusie dat de context van eenheidsregeringen de bewindspersonen meer vatbaar maakt voor kritiek van de oppositie over de prestaties van individuele ministers. De oppositie heeft hier een grotere kans om het politiek kapitaal van de regerende partij te veranderen en daarmee de electorale support voor de regering te verminderen.

De bevindingen laten zien dat verschillende strategieën gelinkt zijn aan verschillende uitkomsten. De uitkomsten kunnen – zoals beschreven in het conceptuele model van de *blaming tree* – verschillende resultaten genereren: het aanwijzen van een zondebok, het beleggen van schuld op een lager politiek niveau (zoals beschreven in hoofdstuk 5 en 7), het sanctioneren van operationele organisaties, en het aanbrengen van veranderingen in de regels en procedures (zoals beschreven in hoofdstuk 4 en 6). De meest politiek gevoelige uitkomst doet zich voor als het resultaat van (systematische) fouten die gemaakt zijn door topambtenaren over een langere tijdsspanne (zoals beschreven in hoofdstuk 4). Vanuit een institutioneel beleidsperspectief is de meest dramatische uitkomst het bewijs dat fundamentele structurele fouten aan te wijzen zijn in beleidsvorming en beleidsuitvoering. Geen van de crisis situaties onderzocht in dit boek hebben dit extreme resultaat teweeg gebracht.

Wanneer en door wie zijn strategieën van schuldontwijking het meest effectief?

Dit onderzoek heeft ook de vraag opgeworpen welke invloed verantwoordingsprocessen hebben op de overlevingskansen van bewindspersonen die met de schuldvraag om moeten gaan. Welke invloed heeft de context op de effectiviteit van bepaalde strategieën? De bevindingen uit dit onderzoek – als ook in andere onderzoeken – leggen nadruk op de invloed van context op de keuze, toepassing en effectiviteit van verschillende strategieën. In sommige situaties zijn bepaalde strategieën niet gepast of niet beschikbaar. De bevindingen wijzen uit dat de huidige politieke macht goed weet te ontkomen aan fouten uit het verleden. Daarnaast is de relatie tot the premier (bijvoorbeeld door de positie binnen de partij) een relevant afschermingsmechanisme voor de schuldvraag. In de Zweedse crises die zijn onderzocht lijkt het erop dat deelname als bewindspersoon aan een eenheidsregering hogere risico's met zich meebrengt wanneer de premier het kabinet reorganiseert als resultaat van verantwoordingsprocessen. Het Nederlandse systeem werkt in die zin als een kaartenhuis dat sneller in elkaar zakt bij het aftreden van individuele bewindspersonen. Politieke ervaring lijkt belangrijk bij het manoeuvreren in verantwoordingsprocessen met een complexe politieke dynamiek. Het is echter niet duidelijk hoe deze ervaring de onderzochte bewindspersonen heeft geholpen. De twee laatste empirische hoofdstukken tonen aan dat het uitmaakt *wie* de actor is in termen van politieke posities binnen de partij of eerdere ervaringen uit voorgaande kabinetsperiodes.

De institutionele factor die het meest van belang lijkt te zijn, zijn de informele verantwoordingsstructuren binnen een kabinet. Dit lijkt belangrijker dan de formele verantwoordingsstructuren binnen het parlement wanneer we kijken naar het aftreden van bewindspersonen na crisis. In de Zweedse cases was het risico dat fouten van individuele ministers de continuïteit van het kabinet als geheel zouden ondermijnen bijvoorbeeld een risico. Continuïteit in draagvlak van het electoraat was de drijvende kracht achter de besluiten van de Zweedse premiers om individuele ministers te laten gaan. Zelden waren het claims vanuit het parlement die direct leidden tot de beëindiging van een ministeriële carrière. Andere informele verantwoordingsmechanismen – de traditionele media en groeiende rol van sociale media – vragen om andere reacties en behandeling. In de Nederlandse cases zijn veel voorbeelden terug te zien van innovatieve manieren waarop snel wordt ingespeeld op kritische situaties, bijvoorbeeld door snelle communicatie. Lange onderzoeksprocessen zijn niet het antwoord op verwachtingen vanuit de gemeenschap. De schuld die toegewezen worden aan een bewindspersoon en de regering verandert sterk over de tijd heen, wat terug te zien is in media-analyses.

In dit boek wordt de vraag gesteld of het uitmaakt *wie* de verantwoordingsstrategieën hanteerde. Het antwoord op deze belangrijke vraag blijft nog altijd "ja". De resultaten van het onderzoek wijzen duidelijk op het feit dat actoren, arena's, en fora sterke relaties met elkaar hebben die van groot belang zijn in het omgaan met verantwoordingsdruk in post-crisis situaties.

Reflectie op de werking en effectiviteit van *blame* strategieën

In het onderzoek komt naar voren dat responsiviteit en openheid de twee belangrijkste elementen zijn in de toepassing van strategieën om de schuld af te wentelen. Beide elementen kunnen een krachtig effect hebben op de manier waarop met de schuldvraag wordt omgegaan. In bijna alle empirische onderzoeken in dit boek geven het publiek, de media en tegenstanders positieve feedback op de bewindspersonen die op een actieve, open en bereidwillige manier reageerden op de crisis en op discussies over mogelijke oorzaken en veroorzakers. Deze (pro-) actieve houding en betrokkenheid moeten een zekere mate van geloofwaardigheid in zich hebben. Gebrek daaraan kan de situatie juist verslechteren, het vergroot de kritiek en vermindert de geloofwaardigheid van de bewindspersoon.

Een belangrijk aspect in het kiezen van een dergelijke strategie heeft te maken met het 'externaliseren' of accepteren van verantwoordelijkheid. Bij de analyse van de cases in dit boek werd duidelijk dat 'down-blaming' een gevaarlijke strategie is en zelden tot een positieve uitkomst leidt. Dit is bijvoorbeeld zichtbaar in de Tsunami case waar de premier de schuld afwentelde op het ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. Voor overheden en politici werkte deze strategie altijd als een boemerang wanneer ze publiekelijk aankondigden dat een staatssecretaris of bijvoorbeeld een andere overheidsorganisatie verantwoordelijkheid zou moeten nemen. Deze bevinding is terug te zien in alle cases.

Een andere strategie is om (onafhankelijke) onderzoeken in te stellen, een strategie die vaak gebruik wordt door beleidsmakers en politici om negatieve incidenten verder uit te kunnen leggen. Door het focussen op feiten, reorganisaties en verbeteringen lijkt verantwoording behapbaar te worden, en iets te zijn wat te controleren is. De strategie is daarmee gericht op het vermijden van verhitte *blame games* (see Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2010). In de sub-onderzoeken in dit boek is duidelijk geworden dat geinitieerd onderzoek slechts een tijdelijk effect heeft op de intensiteit van verantwoordingsdebatten.

Tot slot maken bewindspersonen in een aantal strategieën gebruik van een variëteit aan verschillende verontschuldigingen en het belang van het kiezen van de 'juiste verontschuldiging voor het juiste moment'. Verscheidene cases in dit boek laten duidelijk de invloed van verontschuldigen zien op het proces waarin schuld wordt toegewezen of afgewenteld. Bijvoorbeeld in publieke excuses om kritiek van de politieke oppositie te verzachten, zoals te zien was in Finland en Noorwegen na de Tsunami. Proactieve, ongeforceerde zelfreflectie door de zittende regering – zowel symbolisch als substantieel – ontneemt de oppositie dan de mogelijkheid om aan te vallen. Een zelfde soort effecten zijn terug te zien in andere studies. Het schandaal omtrent misbruik van gevangen in de Verenigde Staten en het Verenigd Koninkrijk wierp schrijnende ethische vragen op die centraal kwamen te staan in het post-crisis verantwoordingsproces. Beleidsmakers moesten gedurende de post-crisis fase verantwoording afleggen over de gepercipieerde ethische overtredingen. Factoren als proportionaliteit en timing speelden hier een belangrijke rol in de uitkomsten van de *blame games* in beide crisis situaties.

Agenda voor toekomstig onderzoek

De druk op politieke leiders en leiderschap als gevolg van door crisis veroorzaakte verantwoordingsprocessen zal niet verkleinen; kritische vragen en groeiende maatschappelijke verwachtingen zullen waarschijnlijk toenemen voor, gedurende en na een crisis. Dit zal effect hebben op de manier waarop crisis, verantwoording en schuld worden gemanaged en welke strategieën daarbij worden ingezet. Vanuit een wetenschappelijk perspectief is het van belang een continue focus te houden op de veelheid en complexiteit van arena's en actoren in crisis en verantwoordingsprocessen om deze te leren begrijpen.

De tijd dat politiek en beleid toebehoorden aan de elite ligt ver achter ons. De prestaties van de politiek, met name gedurende dramatische en buitengewone incidenten zoals crises, kunnen rekenen op grote maatschappelijke interesse. Het gevolg is dat de verwachtingen dat publieke instellingen en hun leiders fouten kunnen uitleggen en verbeteren toenemen. Toekomstige studies naar door crisis veroorzaakte verantwoordingsmechanismen vanuit meervoudige theoretische modellen en vergelijkende case studies zijn daarom noodzakelijk. Daarbij kan een onderscheid worden gemaakt in vijf gebieden waar toekomstig onderzoek zich op zou kunnen richten.

Ten eerste zou de link die in dit onderzoek is gemaakt tussen een variatie in causaliteit van oorzaken (intern/extern) en variatie in uitkomsten van het verantwoordingsprocessen verder kunnen worden onderzocht. Hierbij bleef een aantal belangrijke vragen onbeantwoord. Zijn topambtenaren sneller geneigd om op te stappen als een consequentie van een verantwoordingsproces bij interne of externe causaliteit van de oorzaken? Welke strategieën zijn toepasbaar wanneer de oorzaken worden gezien als intern en welke bij externe causale oorzaken?

Ten tweede kan de doeltreffendheid van *blame management* strategieën in relatie tot degene die er gebruik van maken en degene waar de strategie op gericht is – tegenstanders, publiek, media – verder worden onderzocht. Ook het vergelijken van de effectiviteit van bepaalde strategieën tussen verschillende categorieën van crisis (persoonlijk schandaal, nationale crisis) verdient nader onderzoek.

Ten derde is de 'geschiedenis' en de geloofwaardigheid van bewindspersonen in de situatie voorafgaand aan de crisis mogelijk van belang. Een interessante subvraag daarbij is of een hoog politiek kapitaal voorafgaand aan een crisis een beschermend effect heeft in het verantwoordingsproces.

Een vierde richting voor verder onderzoek betreft de invloed van gender in de keuze van verschillende *blame management* strategieën. Hanteren vrouwen en mannen andere strategieën? Welke benadering kiezen vrouwelijke en mannelijke bewindspersonen? Hoe worden de strategieën van mannen en vrouwen beoordeeld in verschillende categorieën van crisis (nationale veiligheid, natuurrampen, financieel, sociaal)?

Tot slot kan de groei aan informele publieke verantwoordingsmechanismen en fora niet worden genegeerd. Het verdient de aandacht in zowel de crisis verantwoordingsliteratuur als de literatuur over politieke ambtstermijnen. Hoe

bepalend zijn sociale media voorde vorming van het publieke begrip van de crisis situatie en voor de oordelen over bewindspersonen? Onmiddellijke toegang en betrokkenheid van actoren op sociale media verhogen de druk en het tempo van het verantwoordingsproces.

Praktische aanbevelingen voor beleidsmakers

Voor publieke professionals zijn de resultaten van dit onderzoek zowel positief als potentieel negatief. Aan de positieve kant zijn door crisis veroorzaakte verantwoordingsprocessen open om actief aan deel te nemen en beïnvloedbaar. Belangrijke spelers binnen het proces van schuldafwikkeling hebben een – potentiële – invloed op de evaluatie van crises en de ontwikkeling van de dominante crisis perceptie. Om die invloed uit te oefenen moeten publieke professionals een inspanning leveren om op een open en responsieve manier te kijken en te luisteren naar de behoeften en verwachtingen van het publiek. Het is daarbij belangrijk het onderscheid tussen de manier waarop naar de causale oorzaken en verantwoordelijkheid wordt gekeken helder voor ogen te hebben en dat de verantwoordelijken zich realiseren dat beide gelijktijdig geadresseerd dienen te worden.

Besluitvormers kunnen voordeel halen uit vaardigheden, routines en organisaties die hen in staat stellen adaptief en flexibel te reageren op veranderende situaties en open (en vrij toegankelijke) informatie beschikbaar is. Crisis- en verantwoordingsstructuren moeten proactief en flexibel zijn. Dit vraagt van crisis managers om betrokken en eerlijk te handelen.

De toenemende druk op practitioners om aan al deze eisen en taken te voldoen lijkt wellicht een te grote opgave; het zijn ook gewoon mensen. Het is daarom noodzakelijk om ondersteunende structuren te ontwikkelen en voldoende te investeren lang voordat een crisis de kans krijgt om verder te ontkiemen. Deze structuren behoeven continue training en alertheid op de verscheidenheid aan interacties tussen actoren in verschillende arena's die belangen hebben in verantwoordingsprocessen.