

Natten mellan den 30 och 31 oktober 1998 utbröt en brand i en hyrd festlokal i centrala Göteborg. Brandkatastrofen krävde 63 unga människors liv. Reportrar och fotografer var snabbt på plats, och flera av dem kom att bli professionella ögonvittnen till det trauma som utspelade sig. Den medierapportering som följde väckte frågor om hur sådan här journalistik egentligen kommer till. Hur påverkas rapporteringen när journalisterna själva blir indirekt drabbade och kämpar med att bemästra sina egna krisreaktioner? Hur fungerar olycksplatsen som arbetsplats för oförberedda och chockade journalister? Vilka bemästringsstrategier använder reportrar och för att orka genomföra sitt uppdrag? Och vad kan vi i framtiden lära av erfarenheter från den här typen av händelser?

Avhandlingen är en professionsstudie som kombinerar perspektiv och teori från i huvudsak journalistik och krispsykologi. Det är en studie av en yrkesgrupp med ett professionellt uppdrag i en extrem situation, som ögonvittnen till en katastrof. En viktig del av kunskapsbasen vilar på forskning om tidigare olyckor och katastrofer, i synnerhet studier av reaktioner hos insatspersonal under arbete vid allvarliga händelser.

Undersökningen har genomförts som en fallstudie av brandkatastrofen i Göteborg genom litteraturstudier, innehållsanalys och intervjuer. Reportrar och fotografer vid morgon- och kvällspress har intervjuats om deras upplevelser av olycksplatsen som arbetsplats, deras upplevda krisreaktioner och bemästringsstrategier, samt de beslut och handlingar som låg till grund för medierapporteringen. Dessutom har arbetsledare vid samma tidningar intervjuats om arbetet med att skildra denna ofattbara katastrof.

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Liselotte Englund Katastrofens öga



LISELOTTE ENGLUND

KATASTROFENS ÖGA

En studie av journalisters arbete på olycksplats

English abstract

J M G

INSTITUTIONEN FÖR JOURNALISTIK OCH MASSKOMMUNIKATION • GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

ABSTRACT

The Eye of the Disaster

A Study of Journalists' Work at Accident Scenes and Disaster Sites

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The thesis is an occupation study that combines perspective and theory from mainly journalism and crisis psychology. It covers journalists (reporters and photographers) - a work group with a professional mission in an extreme situation, as eyewitnesses to disaster, and their editors. An essential part of the knowledge base rests on research on previous accidents and disasters, particularly studies on the reactions of rescue workers while working during serious events. The research is a case study of the 1998 fire disaster in Gothenburg, which ul-

timately took 63 young people's lives and injured another 213, thereby becoming the largest Swedish fire disaster in modern times. Those who died in the fire were of 19 different nationalities, which contributed to the tragedy receiving massive news coverage both locally and internationally. The ensuing media reporting brought up questions concerning how this type of journalism actually comes into being. How is the reporting influenced when journalists themselves are indirect victims and are struggling to master their own reactions to the crisis? How does

the accident scene function as a workplace for unprepared and shocked journalists? What coping strategies do reporters use to manage to carry out their mission? And what can we learn in the future from our experiences with these types of events?

The study is based on literature studies, content analysis and interviews. In the thesis, journalists' experiences of their own reactions to working at an accident scene have been related to three factors: the person – the human being who is a journalist; the occupation – the journalistic mission and the journalist role; and the situation – the traumatic event and site. A further dimension of the mission, reflection – the need for crisis support as well as self-evaluation and learning – has also been presented.

In the categorizing of the journalists' coping strategies during their work at the accident scene in Gothenburg, four journalist roles have crystallized, namely The Witness, The Weasel, The Hack and The Rescuing Angel. These roles have arisen from the individual ways of reacting to the crisis situation and through the coping strategies that came to be dominant in different individuals. The roles have also been affected by how the conflict between good human being and good journalist was handled, the balance between the roles and the dominance of one or the other.

The results can also be placed in a learning context with the help of theories on professional skill and competence. Such a view of journalistic work at traumatic events can hypothetically

make it easier for journalists to prepare themselves and understand their own reactions in an extreme situation. It is also conceivable that supervisors could be helped by this view, in their aspiration to choose appropriate employees for a mission whenever possible. A reasonable goal is for the employee assigned to witness and report on a trauma to have sufficiently good aggregate competence. In addition to the well-recognized forms of formal, practical, prescribed, situational and applied competence, the thesis has generated a new form called coping competence. This is the individual's ability to master his or her crisis reactions during work at a traumatic event.

The thesis is concluded with recommendations for ten new work norms for media reporting in connection with serious events and potentially traumatic experiences. The Swedish journalist corps's press ethical rules of play should, according to the results of this thesis, benefit from being complemented with the aim of achieving sufficiently good disaster or trauma journalism.

Keywords

journalism, journalists, news coverage, trauma, disasters, coping, stress, competence, journalist roles, media ethic

Katastrofens öga

Katastrofens öga

En studie av journalisters arbete på olycksplats

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

The Eye of the Disaster – a Study of Journalists' Work at Accident Scenes and Disaster Sites.

Late at night on 30 October 1998, an explosive fire broke out at a cramped, overcrowded private party hall in central Gothenburg, Sweden. The fire ultimately took 63 young people's lives and injured another 213, thereby becoming the largest Swedish fire disaster in modern times. Those who died in the fire were of 19 different nationalities, which contributed to the tragedy receiving massive news coverage both locally and internationally. Swedish reporters and photographers were at the scene quickly, and many of them came to be professional eyewitnesses to the developing trauma. The ensuing media reporting brought up questions concerning how this type of journalism actually comes into being. How is the reporting influenced when journalists themselves are indirect victims and are struggling to master their own reactions to the crisis? How does the accident scene function as a workplace for unpre-

pared and shocked journalists? What coping strategies do reporters use to manage to carry out their mission? And what can we learn in the future from our experiences with these types of events?

Chapters 1-5: Theory

This thesis is an occupation study that combines perspective and theory from mainly journalism and crisis psychology. It is a study of a work group with a professional mission in an extreme situation, as eyewitnesses to disaster. An essential part of the knowledge base rests on research on previous accidents and catastrophes, particularly studies on the reactions of rescue workers while working during serious events.

The research is a case study of the fire disaster in Gothenburg based on

literature studies, content analysis and interviews.

In Chapter 1, an overview is presented of the field of knowledge sometimes referred to as disaster journalism. Among other things, three factors that make the work difficult are described: the time press, as well as identifying and interpreting the situation. Chapter 2 on the *situation* gives an account of research on major accidents, disasters and catastrophes, for instance in the form of characteristics and different categories of events. Chapter 3 highlights the *occupation* under study with regard to the journalistic mission, the governing rules and the work norms. A number of paradoxes in the reporting of disasters are highlighted, including role conflicts such as that between professional journalist and fellow human being. Chapter 4, on the *person*, is a discussion of the various personality traits that have an effect on the fulfilment of a mission in the midst of serious and traumatic events. An individual's vulnerability, sensitivity to stress and level of resistance are examples of factors that affect how he or she handles a potentially traumatic experience. Chapter 5 describes the *reaction* of the professional eyewitness, discussing the journalist as someone who is an indirect victim as well as the cognitive, behavioural, emotional and physical reactions that can make themselves known during a traumatic reporting mission. Usual coping strategies are discussed, as is the need for crisis support after the completion of a mission.

Chapter 6: Method

In this study, interviews have been conducted with 15 journalists, photographers and supervisors from two morning newspapers (*Göteborgs-Posten* and *Dagens Nyheter*) and two evening newspapers (*Göteborgs-Tidningen* or *GT* and *Aftonbladet*). The questions were centred on occupation-based and psychological aspects of the journalistic mission in connection with the fire disaster in Gothenburg. The interview subjects were chosen after an analysis of the media content of the respective newspapers. An extensive case journal on the fire was established, with media offer, research, investigation and other written sources as points of departure.

Most of the reporters, photographers and supervisors in the study were on duty during the disaster's first hours. Some arrived at the accident site later, which it itself presents opportunities for interesting comparisons.

There were many different positions among the supervisors interviewed, such as editor-in-chief, locally based project leader and editor of photography. Those who were interviewed included personnel stationed in both Gothenburg and Stockholm, both permanently employed and freelancers, and both men and women. Informants also represented a broad age range.

In chapters 7-12, the results from the interviews are presented in quotes from reporters and photographers as well as their supervisors.

Chapters 7-12: Empiricism

In the six following chapters, the journalists' narratives are presented and discussed in the form of frequent interview quotes. Chapter 7, on the *situation*, describes the journalists' experiences of their arrival at the accident scene and the extreme working conditions they suddenly had to cope with. Following this are two chapters on the *occupation*. Chapter 8 contains a discussion of the effect the journalistic mission and regulations had on their work, and Chapter 9 addresses the judgments and decisions in this work situation, filled with work-related challenges and paradoxes. Chapter 10, on the *person*, highlights how personality factors such as vulnerability and coping ability affected the work results. Two chapters are dedicated to *reflection*: Chapter 11 addresses processing and recovering, that is the journalists' need for crisis support and the media companies' ways of meeting these needs; Chapter 12, on self-evaluation and learning, is based on how the journalists evaluated their own and their colleagues' work performance.

Chapter 13. Results: The journalist as professional eyewitness

In the thesis, journalists' experiences with working at an accident scene have been related to three factors: the *person* – the human being who is a journalist; the *occupation* – the

journalistic mission and the journalist role; and the *situation* – the traumatic event and site. A further dimension of the mission, *reflection* – the need for crisis support as well as self-evaluation and learning – has also been presented.

The last chapter presents some of the study's main conclusions in three sections: First, the thesis questions are answered; then, role conflicts and journalists roles are discussed; finally, disaster – or trauma – journalism is considered from a competence perspective.

Findings from the study's questions:

The significance of the situation

The dominating conclusion regarding the significance of the situation for a reporting mission was the fact that many reporters and photographers were at the scene of the accident and *witnessed* the progression of the catastrophe. This came to have great significance for many of them – personally and from a crisis psychology viewpoint, as well as professionally. Unbearable scenes were played out before their very eyes. Many experienced a difficult dilemma in having come to the scene with a mission other than that of saving lives, namely that of reporting on this incomprehensible situation. The thesis title “The Eye of the Disaster” comes from the fact that journalists are a disaster's professional eyewitnesses, precisely at its centre. There, in the trauma's absolute field of chaos, life can stand still just

as it does in the eye of a storm, for a number of moments, when everything seems unreal and make-believe like in a film, and the inability to act as well as overactivity can strike the journalist.

Another complicating factor was the journalists' total *unpreparedness* for what lay waiting. No one knew anything about the extent of the accident. Many had merely gone to the scene after learning of a fire alarm. Gradually, as the picture of what had happened became clearer, the journalists' frustration also increased at the fact that neither they nor anyone else could control what would happen. The rescue possibilities were experiences as too small, the consequences impossible to take in. If such *uncontrollability* is reinforced with individual vulnerability and possible lack of food and sleep as well as ill-health and other factors, the situation is even more difficult for the journalist to cope with.

In many aspects, the *stressors* the journalists mentioned are identical to those Dyregrov and others have shown in rescue workers and other 'helpers' (Tab. 2, p.43). Included here are the uncertainty both during mobilization and on the scene, the strong sensory impressions, the sight of and contact with the deceased and injured, the wide scope the disaster turned out to have, the fire's duration and intensity, the experience of danger and the role conflict between person and occupation – fellow human being and journalist. A stressor that Dyregrov – naturally – did not find in help wor-

kers, but that was found in the journalists, was the experience of guilt and shame. These stressors can be said to have been both functional and dysfunctional during the reporting – functional in that it made both reporters and photographers take a step back and act with restraint in a way that nearly surprised themselves, and dysfunctional in that the feelings of guilt and shame tended to increase the journalists' crisis reactions and interfere with their ability to cope with the situation. Furthermore, the feelings of guilt and shame often brought on a possibly exaggerated restraint and inability to act, which could be defended morally but not professionally.

The significance of the occupation

The fact that a catastrophe is theoretically a classic example of a good news item naturally affects journalists' driving force to report. The criteria for both a disaster and an event with high news value are that the event has arisen quickly, is unexpected, is of general interest with significance for many, and has a high identification factor and an uncertain ending. A disaster is thus, cynically, the perfect news item, *in the public interest*. Naturally, the journalists' professional drive was triggered, and naturally their adrenaline levels rose, when the alarm was sounded that there was a fire in central Gothenburg. That there would be an expectation to be able to read about this event when it became common knowledge the next morning

was self-evident. The media have a duty to tell about the unbearable as well.

The *journalistic work role* was put to the test upon arrival on the accident scene is beyond all doubt. “I was a bad journalist that time”, said a reporter who felt that the built-in professionalism had been rather shaky just then. Others experienced the opposite, an increased professional sharpness, and immediately upon arrival on the scene were able to “see the headline picture in their head”. The journalists’ *ways of working* varied. Most worked alone, without a colleague from the same paper, at the scene during the first hours of the catastrophe. One paper, however, was represented by two reporters, who spontaneously divided their duties into “a straight news reporter and an observer”. Due to time concerns, especially in the case of the evening newspapers, a reporting form quite similar to that of radio journalism developed. Telephone reporters rang in and their reports were mingled with interviews from the editorial board and facts taken from other media. The result of this was multiple-paged articles with a common by-line that credited numerous reporters and photographers.

As regards *working guidelines and press ethical rules of the game*, the two that were dominant in people’s thoughts were consideration and discussion: “Always show crime and accident victims the greatest possible consideration” and “Be prude with photographs”. The journalists on the accident scene in Gothenburg

experienced that they showed as much consideration as they could. A news supervisor, however, wondered whether one might sometimes show too much consideration in these situations. Consideration cannot affect the reporting of information, he said: “then Sweden’s history will never be able to be written”. The right amount of consideration in the case of pictures is about capturing the right moment, with as few attempts as possible. A photographer stated that he was not able to take pictures by pure chance, due to the risk of disturbing and provoking the youths. Instead, he tried different camera settings from a somewhat secluded area, so that he could then take as few pictures as possible. The most difficult balance act was judging the condition of the youths being photographed. Were they injured or deceased? The risk of sending in a picture to the newspaper with a caption telling that an injured girl was being carried out when she actually was not alive was obvious. And these kinds of mistakes were made. Heavy stress, the time pressure and a certain lack of knowledge can be explanations for this. Taking pictures without exposing a person’s identity was also a very difficult task – nearly impossible – but many photographers succeeded. And when it was not possible to get pictures with the subjects’ faces turned away, etc., the pictures were attended to (in many cases only in later newspaper editions) through masking/pixeling subjects’ faces.

The significance of the person

Reporters and photographers are human beings – individuals with characteristics like *personality traits*, *vulnerability*, *life experience*, *stress sensitivity* and *coping ability*. However, journalists view themselves as “iron men”, with steel armour to shield them from all manners of threat. This is naturally unreasonable, based on myths and clichés. But if by iron man (or woman) one means the ability to cope with the stress of the moment, discard the crisis reaction and focus on the mission, there were many iron men at Backaplan that tragic October night. On the other hand, no one is an iron man in the meaning that he or she is unaffected by the experience. It is surely here that the greatest misinterpretation occurs – that the armour or professional filter a journalist puts up at an accident scene should also make him or her a generally invulnerable person.

Many journalists gave examples of significant *vulnerability factors* that night in Gothenburg. Included were the previous loss of one’s own child or another relative, as well as previous confrontations with violent death and fire.

It is not a given that long journalistic experience is sufficient to cope with the situation at events like the Gothenburg fire. A reporter said that other *life experience*, such as many years working as a nurse, was of more help in handling the situation than a great deal of experience in journalism would have been.

Journalists who witness a disaster should be seen as *indirect victims* of the event. If the journalists from the Gothenburg fire are placed on Yerkes and Dobson’s stress reaction curve (Fig. 3, p. 104), it is easier to understand the journalists’ descriptions of their reactions at different times. On the way from the news desk to the accident scene, the adrenaline starts to rise and the built-in professional reflex starts to set itself to reporting. The ability to perform is probably at its best when journalists are still “protected” by their coping strategies, have their “work filter” over their eyes and are super-focused. The stress reaction can rise to a certain limit, only to sometimes “tip over” when it rises too high and continues to rise while at the same time the ability to perform decreases. This can be caused by, for example, a trigger that causes one’s work filter to loosen and feelings to overflow. The reaction can lead to an inability to act, or possibly overactivity, which also does not allow for a good work performance. Perhaps it was precisely at this point a reporter found herself when she said that “I was a bad journalist then and actually should’ve gone home”. It may have been this reporter herself who went weak in the knees and “started pumping blood”, or someone else who “fell apart”. Just who will “tip over” is very difficult – or impossible – to predict. It can be a case of anything from individual vulnerability to “having a bad day”, caused perhaps by lack of food or sleep.

In Gothenburg, there were exam-

les of both problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping strategies among the journalists. A great many of the coping strategies noted among rescue workers turned out to also apply to the journalists:

Mental preparedness: How they reasoned on the way to the accident scene.

Feeling of unreality: Described by practically all of the journalists.

Repression of reactions: Attitude that "you're not allowed to fall apart".

Distancing and dehumanization: One chooses to think of headline pictures instead of thinking too much about what is actually happening.

Humour: Some attempts at using humour were made, but were not experienced as effective.

Regulation of exposure: Many tried to hide both themselves and their attributes – both when considering others and when acting on one's self-preservation instinct.

Activity to hinder reflection: Only one photographer mentioned over-activity as a defence mechanism, but many kept themselves busy helping and talking to the youths.

Meaning: People sought meaning, but did not find it...

Self-reinforcing comments: "I have to make it through this".

Contact with others – social support: Cited as very important.

For most of the photographers and reporters, coping strategies were *functional*, that is gave them the ability to carry out their missions.

The significance of reflection

A completed mission is followed by a phase of reflection, recovery and self-evaluation. The Gothenburg fire became something of a starting point for many media companies who had never previously conducted *defusing sessions*, *debriefings* or other organized *crisis support* in the workplace. After the fire, this occurred to differing degrees at various editorial offices, and with varying success. Generally, the readiness to care for employees was low. Journalists felt that they were helped most by "informal after-chat". Both reporters and photographers conducted this at their own initiative. Some visited the family church leader while others went to the police and emergency services to talk to the rescue workers who had worked that night. A photographer said that "the picket police were my crisis group". Family and friends were also mentioned as having been indispensable discussion partners. In certain cases the contact-seeking of those close to them, and sometimes a nearly curious interrogation, as a strain. Regarding the *self-evaluations* of the journalists' own contributions, they felt for the most part that they had accomplished their mission surprisingly well thanks to functional reactions to the event, a professional attitude about the situation and a certain amount of built-in ethics. Most seemed to have a realistic and rational view of how possible it was to do their job under the prevailing circumstances. Even if many concluded that it is not possible to

prepare oneself for an accident or disaster on the level of the Gothenburg fire, most agreed about the importance of organizational *learning* from the event. Some necessary improvements mentioned were a better editorial readiness for the handling of crises after traumatic missions. From the lessons derived from the Gothenburg fire, questions were brought up regarding the need for education: Crisis psychology, disaster journalism and first aid were mentioned as ingredients in the journalism degree and as further education for current journalists.

Journalist roles at the scene of an accident

In the categorizing of the journalists' coping strategies during their work at the accident scene in Gothenburg, four journalist roles have crystallized (Fig. 4, p. 206). The roles have arisen from the individual ways of reacting to the crisis situation and through the coping strategies that came to be dominant in different individuals. The roles have also been affected by how the conflict between good human being and good journalist was handled, the balance between the roles and the dominance of one or the other.

The journalist role I call *The Witness* is characterized by both problem solving and emotional coping. He or she is stricken by strong emotional reactions but solves the problem. The journalistic mission is to be conducted professionally, but not at the cost

of an inquisitiveness that disturbs the victims – or of unnecessarily exposing oneself to unpleasant scenes. The professional eyewitness stays at an appropriate distance from the disaster's epicentre, but is very observant and notes details to report. The photographing witness uses a telephoto lens rather than getting too close, and takes pictures selectively rather than “vacuuming the scene”. Suffers from a feeling of unreality, but seeks meaning. Combines the roles of good human being and good journalist in a way that is easy to handle, which leads to a good journalistic result with eyewitness testament as method. The photographing witness thinks “I’m sorry” while taking pictures, but does not forget the mission: to report.

A role that suppresses a person's own reactions and instead causes him or her to only react in a problem-solving manner is *The Weasel*, which regulates the exposure to trauma - both by adjusting one's own mental exposure to the unbearable and hiding one's work role as much as possible from victims. The weasel sneaks in close to the event and holds the camera behind his or her back or stuffs the notepad and pen in a pocket. Thinks up headline pictures and might just be awarded “Picture of the Year”, but does not want to disturb victims unnecessarily and absolutely does not want his or her presence to cause provocation. Steps to the side to test the aperture settings, and takes no more pictures than are necessary. The writing weasel wants to ease his or her feelings of guilt, and perhaps facilitate

contact with victims, by not revealing his or her occupation. The weasel reporter can appear to be the average adult, hugging, chatting, comforting and lending his or her mobile phone. During this time the weasel is also working professionally: collecting quotation marks and other notations in his or her head, to later transcribe the interviews that no one knew were taking place.

The most problem-solving of all the roles is *The Hack*, who is simultaneously dominated by being a good journalist and suppresses the feeling of needing to be a good human being at that moment. The hack stays active – sometimes hyperactive – to hinder reflection on what is happening. The hack's foremost coping strategies are distancing and dehumanizing. He or she can be seen as cold and cynical, but actually just wants to accomplish the mission. However, the hyperactivity can express itself in unnecessarily frequent and indiscriminate photographing. The hack persuades him or herself that this is not actually happening but is in fact an unusually scary film or nightmare that will be over as soon as the mission is finished. It is not seldom that the hack is hailed by the editor – sometimes completely justifiably – for his or her fantastic ability to immediately capture the front-page picture or for a perfect interview with a self-proclaimed hero or a talkative eyewitness. But the hack's activity is deceptive at times. Because of the extreme problem-solving attitude, he or she can miss important nuances such as the difference between someone

who is injured and someone who is dead, or between someone who is shocked and someone who is composed.

The Rescuing Angel reacts and copes with the situation emotionally. Seeks a great deal of contact with others, needs social support and after a short time completely sheds his or her journalistic work role. Diminishes the importance of the professional mission and stresses to him or herself the importance of being a good human being. Simultaneously wants to help and go home. Should, but cannot manage to, report. Feels that no colleagues understand, sees him or herself as a bad journalist, but at the same time feels that it does not make a great deal of difference at the moment. An article or picture is a worldly thing in comparison with what is happening and has happened. At the moment, feels best acting as a good human being, but afterwards is struck by a number of journalistic qualms. Can also have a hard time getting sympathy for these reactions from management.

Slippage between these roles can occur in one and the same person, during one and the same mission. Often, however, one role is dominant in an individual. But someone who reacts like a witness to one type of event can be a hack another time. The basic point is that the journalist is always both human being and professional journalist, and that the situation affects the reaction to a very high degree.

A competence perspective on journalistic work

The thesis's analysis model (Fig. 1, p. 30) can also be placed in a learning context with the help of theories on professional skill and competence. Such a view of journalistic work at traumatic events can hypothetically make it easier for journalists to prepare themselves and understand their own reactions in an extreme situation. It is also conceivable that supervisors could be helped by this view, in their aspiration to choose appropriate employees for a mission whenever possible. The competence model for catastrophe journalism (Fig. 5, p. 264) could also, I believe, be a tool for increasing management's insight into employees' need for support after reporting. Competence is about being sufficient for a specific mission. A reasonable goal is for the employee assigned to witness and report on a trauma to have *sufficiently good aggregate competence*.

In addition to the well-recognized forms of formal, practical, prescribed, situational and applied competence, the thesis has generated a new form that I have chosen to call *coping competence*. This is the individual's ability to master his or her crisis reactions during work at a traumatic event.

Recommended work norms for disaster and trauma journalism

The thesis is concluded with recommendations for ten new work norms for media reporting in connection with serious events and potentially traumatic experiences. The Swedish journalist corps's press ethical rules of play should, according to the results of this thesis, benefit from being complemented with the aim of achieving "sufficiently good catastrophe or trauma journalism".

Liselotte Englund's recommended work norms for disaster and trauma journalism are as follows:

1. Reflect over the fact that interview subjects who are shocked and otherwise traumatized can not only be damaged by publicity from the media exposure they receive in a vulnerable situation. Also be aware that a shocked and traumatized person is not always a reliable eyewitness; in other words, a dubious source.
2. If possible, avoid interviews with shocked and traumatized victims, reporting instead through your own eyewitness accounts.
3. When choosing pictures depicting identifiable people, take special care in editions and broadcasts with a range near the accident scene or areas otherwise affected (for example, an international disaster in which the Swedish victims come from one or a small

- number of geographical places).
4. If possible, even at the scene avoid photographing completely identifiable people whose faces will need to be masked/pixeled before publication. Try to make a selection at the scene.
 5. Avoid giving your paper or TV channel picture captions or comments that can be misleading or become obsolete in a publicity-damaging way. Avoid referring to someone as “saved” or “wounded” if their condition is uncertain or they risk a fatal outcome before or soon after publication.
 6. Work preferably in teams of two with eyewitness reporting from an accident scene. The psychological support from a colleague at the scene can prove to be indispensable in psychologically and professionally coping with a traumatic experience, both at the scene and in the longer run.
 7. Make it clear for both your journalist colleague and your surroundings that journalists’ mission at an accident site is different to that of other work groups present in a crucial way: journalists do not arrive with the aim of helping and saving lives, but as professional eyewitnesses. An increased understanding and knowledge of this can in the best case counteract the enormous feelings of guilt and shame that strike journalists when they witness and report on an ongoing trauma as professionals.
 8. Be aware that apparently absurd behaviour (like aggression, humour and distancing) can be normal reactions to an abnormal event. This applies to both victims (for instance, injured and survivors at the accident scene) and the indirectly victims (for instance, witnessing journalists). Make sure to have basic knowledge of normal crisis reactions and coping strategies, so that the situation will be somewhat less hard to handle and incomprehensible.
 9. Crisis support for media personnel, exactly like for everyone else, should be based on the individual’s needs. The employer/media company should establish an organization for such crisis support as well as any treatment that may be needed, according to most recent experience with social and psychological support in response to potentially traumatic experiences. Social support from family and colleagues should not be underestimated.
 10. Introduce systematic organizational learning after traumatic reporting missions – whether it concerns accidents, catastrophes, crime, terrorist attacks or war. The employees who have experienced and reported on these events have invaluable experience that should be shared with their own media company as well as their entire body of colleagues.

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Lagtexter

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Webb

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