Identification of key factors that support and limit action plan implementation after a SimEx and suggestions on how to overcome the challenges

Simulation exercises (SimEx) can help different sectors to coordinate by for instance revealing gaps in plans that involved actors did not know existed. To increase the probability that people will be better prepared for a future crisis, gaps in a SimEx must be addressed.

Exercises such as simulation exercises can be very helpful for stakeholders involved in emergency/disaster response. To be better prepared for future events with low probability and large-scale consequences, gaps in a SimEx must be addressed. The identified gaps could be more or less complex, and recommendations to address the gaps should be documented in an action plan. The action plan should include recommendations, responsible person for the implementation, and a timeframe. However, action plans are rarely fully implemented even though substantial resources go into the planning and execution of a SimEx. This study looked factors that support and limit action plan implementation and how challenges that hinder action plan implementation can be solved.

Two questions were answered in the thesis: what are the key factors that limit and support the implementation of action plans after a SimEx, and what can be done to overcome the challenges related to the implementation of the action plan. To address the questions, I investigated available literature on the subject, and I carried out interviews with people that work with simulation exercises. The people that I interviewed had many years of experience and a clear picture of challenges that hinder action plan implementation. The people represented the health sector, defence sector, public sector, and academic sector, and some of them had worked in Sweden and others had international experience.

This study found 11 key factors that are affecting the probability of action plan implementation after a simulation exercise. Some of the factors were similar and could be categorized into themes, and in total five themes were discovered: Planning, Resources, Learning, Realism, and Priority. The challenges that were identified could be addressed by for instance good cultural understanding according to the people interviewed, and it was recommended to document how the challenges were solved. This would allow people that were not part of the simulation exercise to also understand how implementation challenges can be overcome.

One future research area is to investigate the relative importance of the identified key factors. Today it is recommended to consider all key factors for successful implementation, but it could be that one key factor is more important to consider than another. It was also found in the study that there are other tools than action plans that are effective for implementing change and that too much focus is on action plans rather than change management tools. This should be further investigated, but I hope that this research will help people that work with simulation exercises to have a better understanding of what increase the probability that action plans are implemented after a simulation exercise.

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