THE CURRENT ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH TO EXIT STRATEGIES IN HUMANITARIAN RELIEF PROJECTS:

A STUDY ON DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN LARGE HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS

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Author:
Kiona Bolt
Student number: s2397269

Supervisor: Monique Westra LL.M MA
University of Groningen

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research paper is to examine the factors that influence the decision-making process on the 'when' and 'how' of exit strategies in humanitarian relief operations. The rationale for choosing to study exit strategies is because there appears to be a clear research gap in the literature on humanitarian action. Whilst operational efficiency is extensively measured and evaluated in evaluative studies, not much attention is given towards what an exit strategy should constitute of or if project impact sustainability is taken into account when making such a decision. The overall aim of this research is to add a beneficial analysis that could be used by others to get a clearer insight in what goes on inside organisations of large humanitarian agencies when taking decisions on operational issues. The case of exit strategies is an excellent operational subject to investigate on. Thus, the following research question has been formulated:

**How do humanitarian organisations decide when to leave or hand over their emergency relief projects, especially in the context of the shifting in the overall humanitarian approach?**

The hypothesis that follows this research question is that humanitarian organisations still do not consider the longer-term outcomes when deciding on an exit strategy, which runs contrary to other efforts and ideas made in the humanitarian sector to improve project impact sustainability.

The theoretical framework used in this study consists of a model that reflects the motivational bases of organisational decision-making. This is integrated with the different relevant factors found that influence the decision for an exit strategy. By taking three different humanitarian organisations of the same size as case study, the importance of each factor is examined and thereafter compared. On the basis of the relation of the motivational grounds of these factors, this research illustrates which motivational influence is the most predominant in their exit strategy decisions and why.

The findings show that there is no comparative pattern in decision-making in between the three humanitarian organisations. Upon closer examination, however, it is discovered
that the mandate of humanitarian organisations is the grounds for this disparity in between the different decision-making patterns. This in turn directly impacts or limits thinking on longer-term project impacts, which can be an explanatory reason for why humanitarian organisations still largely implement an exit strategy on an ad-hoc basis. This runs contrary to the academic trend in humanitarian literature, which is showing a move towards a more sustainable approach in humanitarian relief projects. The research therefore demonstrates a large gap in this area, and further research is needed to find ways of incorporating more sustainable approaches.
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<td>ALNAP</td>
<td>Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance</td>
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<td>GPC</td>
<td>Global Protection Cluster</td>
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<td>IASC</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Standing Committee</td>
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<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
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<td>IDPs</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
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<td>IRC</td>
<td>International Rescue Committee</td>
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<td>MoH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<td>MSF</td>
<td>Médecins Sans Frontières</td>
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<td>NGO(s)</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSEA</td>
<td>Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Project</td>
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<td>SIDA</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commission for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
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<td>UNOCHA</td>
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<td>UNOPS</td>
<td>United Nations Office for Project Services</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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PREFACE

This study was sparked when looking into how humanitarian organizations functioned. It became quickly apparent how little structure there appeared to be in project termination, or in other words what was behind the “exit strategy” of a humanitarian project. Because the research topic in itself is not covered that well in the academic circles, my personal gratitude goes out especially to the individuals of the case study organisations who had been willing to participate in this study: Mr. Kevin Phellan from Doctors Without Borders USA, Mr Gerald Martone from International Rescue Committee and Ms. Rahel Cascioli from World Vision, without whom the data analysis would not have been completed.

Secondly, I would also like to thank my supervisor, Monique Westra. Thirdly, this study would have also not been possible without the help and continuous support of my family and friends. With family, I refer not only to my relatives but also to what has grown into the NOHA-family, without which I could not have succeeded in this study. A large part of my gratitude for support goes out to my father, who spent many hours helping me.
1. INTRODUCTION

Why study exit strategies in the humanitarian sector?

Since its’ inception, the humanitarian sector has taken on many changes – responding to world’s most disastrous events whilst at the same time, recognising and adapting to its own flaws. By being self-critical by nature, the humanitarian sector is in a constant innovative mode, with either (real-time) evaluations, lessons learnt or recommendation reports behind virtually every project that is carried out in this sphere of work.

As each theme in the humanitarian sector has its own specific tasks and complications, critics and scholars nowadays tend to be divided into thematic focuses such as food or shelter or public health. Yet, over the past number of years, there has been a broadly critical trend across the humanitarian system. The debate has opened up for more conversation around the sustainability of humanitarian aid and linking relief to development aid (Labbé, 2012; Taylor et al, 2012). Some of these trends echo the problematic and negative effects of the short-term, “classical” provision of providing humanitarian relief. In this sense, humanitarian assistance is traditionally viewed as an “emergency service“ (Zhang, Zhou & Nunamaker, 2002: 372); an emergency situation occurs and humanitarian actors deliver aid with guidelines rooted in the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

In this process, the contextual situation is sometimes not accounted for. Dilemma’s and crises arise that sometimes impact negatively on the targeted population that humanitarian organisations are trying to help and the goals that the organisation has set to achieve. One of the clearest examples of such a negative impact is the militarisation of refugee camps during the Rwandan genocide (Barber, 1997). At the front of this critical stance is Mary Anderson, arguing that committing additional limited and timed resources in emergency situations, especially in the context of conflict, might do more damage than good (Anderson, 1996). These examples illustrate the need for a more context, longer-term focused view on humanitarian relief projects. Resonating this argument, Taylor et al (2012) stress that short-term help might alleviate the immediate misery, but it does
nothing to help the overall suffering these victims of catastrophes. Some have even argued that people are better off in emergency situations as they then qualify to receive resources more immediately than during otherwise ‘normal’ status quo, that would preclude them from otherwise receiving (Ooms & Sondorp, 2006).

As a result of the somewhat problematic consequences of short-term relief in some contexts, scholars and humanitarian organisations are now advocating for a more long-term approach before entering an emergency situation – incorporating early recovery strategies during the emergency phase, sustainable shelter and more considerations for the immediate environment at the emergency phase of an operation.

The value of studying exit strategies in humanitarian relief projects

Though the move away from ‘traditional’ thinking in the humanitarian sector is welcomed and advocated by an increasing amount of scholars and practical experts in humanitarianism, there are certain topics that retain a distinct blur when thinking about implementing a longer-term, more sustainable approach. The humanitarian mandate, for example, is one of the themes currently being heavily debated and revised, along with the division of responsibilities between (purely) ‘humanitarian’ and ‘developmental’ agencies (Labbé, 2012).

The debate is much smaller, however, regarding how humanitarian agencies might leave the context or situation in this trend in humanitarian literature. This is because this new trend in the literature moves away from the idea that humanitarian aid is only supplied in a certain ‘phase’ of an emergency – thus relief projects should only end once the overall situation or context has improved. This is to avoid sudden departures when the emergency phase in a country is officially declared over, whilst in reality circumstances have not changed at all. An example of this was the departure of Médecines Sans Frontières (MSF) in Sierra Leone in 1999: whilst the official emergency phase was declared over, the actual situation had not improved at all (Gallagher, 2000). These situations do not leave much room for organisations to think about an exit strategy in their projects. What seems to be overlooked in this trend in the literature is the fact that
humanitarian relief is still intended to be finite; that is, projects do have finite resources and a timeframe that have to be dealt with.

Exit strategies are not covered or studied as much as other stages in a project cycle. Many evaluations tend to focus on other parts of the project cycle; the efficiency of the project, the logistics of the delivery of aid and the start-up of the project. Thus a comparative evaluation of which exit strategies have already been used by different agencies in different emergency contexts has been largely absent in the humanitarian sector. It is crucial that the exit strategy of the project is well thought through and properly executed, as practical guides explain.¹

The consequences of leaving or handing over a project too early or too late might go far beyond the project impact – it might complicate access for future projects in the same country, or dissatisfy donors (IASC exit strategy guide, 2000). Besides timing, the decision on how to carry out an exit strategy is also crucial to think about because it influences other phases in project cycles. If this is not decided, the planning of distribution of resources or handover to other agencies might not go smoothly or occur in a disastrous way, as was the case in Haiti (Streets et al, 2012). In the evaluation of the cluster approach in Haiti, most clusters indicated to have no exit strategy, making it difficult for organisations to harmonise handover or simply have a smooth exit. In simpler terms: how can one start up a project with finite resources and funding if one does not know how to end it? These subjects combined result into the following general research question:

*How do humanitarian organisations decide when to leave or hand over their emergency relief projects, especially in the context of the shifting in the overall humanitarian approach?*

¹ For practical guides, the following have been found and consulted: C-SAFE’s practical guidance for developing exit strategies in the fields, IASC Exit Strategy guide, World Food Program’s Exiting Emergencies and the Global Protection Cluster’s Good practices/Lessons learned from the field on exit strategy from emergency response to recovery and development.
The argumentation that this paper proposes goes alongside answering whether humanitarian organisations base their exit strategies on essentially ad-hoc criteria. This results into the short-term impact mentality, which is directly contrary to the trends shown in the literature on humanitarian action, as well as surfacing practices in the field that incorporate more sustainable, longer-term project outcomes.

The subsequent chapters will answer and argue the above. The theoretical framework that is introduced will be constructed through answering the following sub-questions:

1) How do organisations in general make decisions?
2) What are the main motivational factors and influencers behind these decisions?
3) What are the factors affecting the exit strategy decision in humanitarian relief projects?
4) What are the motivational bases of each of the factors that influence the exit strategy decision?

The answer to these sub-questions will form a comprehensive theoretical framework in which the data can be analysed. The sub-question answered in the data analysis is formulated as follows:

- Based on the data found, what is the decision-making pattern regarding exit strategies in each of the organisations (MSF, IRC and World Vision) examined?

Through this data analysis in which the theoretical framework will be used, the main research question will be answered. Further on, in the data discussion and comparison, the hypothesis proposed will be confirmed through the answering of the following questions:

- Is there a comparative pattern to be discovered in between the three different decision-making patterns?
- Why is this the case?

The value of this study in the humanitarian system

As Liesbet Heyse (2006) remarked, many evaluative studies within the humanitarian system are aimed at program or project efficiency and operations rather than their
associated organisational capacity and structure. This creates the assumption that humanitarian organisations already have the structure or capacity in place to carry out these operations smoothly.

This study aims to analyse the background to exit strategies, whilst simultaneously seeking to discover a pattern or anomaly in the decision-making process of the exit strategies within and between three different NGOs. The overall aim of this research is to add a beneficial analysis that could be used by others to get a clearer insight in what goes on inside organisational structures of large humanitarian agencies when taking operational decisions. This will provide a better understanding for the future of exit strategies in the humanitarian sector and the implication of a shifting approach in humanitarian relief projects.

1.1. Methodology: Introducing the case studies, methodology and context of this study

1.1.1. Research methodology

The research will start off by a selective overview on organisational theory, focusing on decision-making processes in organisations and firms. The reason for choosing to focus on organisational theory is because the research question implicitly has a focus on organisational dynamics. As the research question is explicitly asking on how decisions within organisations are made, the appropriate theory subject to approach is therefore theories on organisational decision-making. The theory of James March (1994) on organisational decision-making is regarded to be most appropriate for this topic and the purpose of the research. His supposition of different types of decisions, as well as his ideas on organisational structure, offers a useful explanation for the analysis. The prioritisation of certain decisions above others is also in line with the hypothesis proposed throughout this study.

At the same time theories of International Relations, namely Rationalism, Social Constructivism and Marxism will be used in order to underpin the motivational bases of
decisions. The choice for using these theories is because parallels can be drawn between the main points of these theories, and the motivational bases for decision-making.

These theories will therefore be approached from a decision-making angle, parting from traditional International Relations theoretical perspectives which consider the international system as a whole in certain perspectives that have different motivations. This approach is somewhat unique, as analysis of International Relations theory is not considered for analysing individual organisations, especially when it comes to internal decisions. Instead, these perspectives are usually applied to a more holistic picture in which multiple actors are considered. From these observations, a motivational basis or pattern is then constructed. This study is therefore unique in the sense that it takes these observations and then applies it on an individual and internal basis. The reason for taking this perspective on International Relations theory is because it is a logical base of explanation, and the main point of theories fit with the motivational bases in decision-making.

This study therefore analyses from a theoretical perspective not only how decisions are taken, but also why. Using guidelines, evaluations and academic articles concerning exit strategies, the second part of the research includes a literature review identifying the factors that mostly influence exit strategy decision-making. Different strands of literature shall be looked at in order to be inclusive of all factors involved.

The theoretical framework sets up an illustrative model on the conclusions drawn from the discussion of the theory, dividing the factors into the different motivational aspects discussed in the first half of the theoretical framework, whilst keeping track of the role of structure in the decision-making process in the case of exit strategies. Thereafter, the research turns to the application of the devised decision-making model on exit strategies to humanitarian organisations chosen as case studies, which are Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), International Rescue Committee (IRC) and World Vision.

The data analysis on the case studies will be done through document analysis on exit strategies of organisations, as well as analysis of interviews conducted with individuals in
the research target organisations. The results are thereafter portrayed in the model devised in the theoretical framework.

Based on the data analysis, a discussion will ensue to discuss and compare the decision-making models constructed and the particular issues that were found relevant to answering the overall research question.

The conclusion of this research will then summarise the findings, which will thereafter validate the argumentation proposed above; namely that humanitarian organisations are currently still planning and implementing exit strategies on an ad-hoc basis. This will further point speculative recommendations for further research in (humanitarian) organisations.

1.2. Selecting the case studies

This study has focused on humanitarian organisations that provide humanitarian relief in multiple countries and contexts. The organisations chosen for data analysis are Médecins Sans Frontières, WorldVision and the International Rescue Committee. Though having different mandates, these organisations were chosen because they are comparative in size, and function fully as an independent NGO. A conscious choice was thus made to exclude research on United Nations and Red Cross & Red Crescent Movement agencies, as those agencies have a somewhat unique nature in terms of its mandate, which is not comparable to other humanitarian organisations. Organisations that have a variable mandate, yet are comparable in size were used. As it was made clear that the role of the mandate or mission of a humanitarian organisation would be a large part of the research, it was logical to opt for a number of organisations with different types of mandates.

A cross-comparison study of two different organisations was not opted for, for a number of reasons. Firstly, a direct consequence of having a cross-comparison would have been that both organisations needed to have similar mandates, thus not allowing much room for a closer look into the relation a mandate has with an exit strategy. Secondly, though a cross-comparison examination of two different organisations would have allowed for a deeper, more exclusive analysis of the organisations, the study would have been limited
in its scope of application in the humanitarian system. As it is a central aim for this piece of research to add something of value to the humanitarian sector in general, it was thought to have a comparison study between more then two organisations.

Whilst aiming for a more universe approach, a balanced choice had to be made when considering the size, nature and availability of information in any selected organisations.

The choice was made to approach Médecins Sans Frontières, International Rescue Committee and World Vision as potential case studies. This is done precisely because they have diverse mandates, yet all organisations have grown to be of global size, operating cross-continentally in multiple contexts at the same time. There are several indications as to what is meant by ‘balanced choice’. Firstly, all organisations have also existed for a longer period of time, meaning that they all have a degree of growth and continuity. This is reflected in their financial income; all organisations chosen have annual donation incomes that amount to over $ 100 million for at least the past 5 years.\(^2\) This indicates that, even though project funds might be different, the overall organisations have a certain financial reputation and have proven to be financially stable over the past couple of years. This is important, as a large disparity on the economic side will not be comparable to one another.

Secondly, all organisations work in multiple countries, with World Vision working in over 90 different countries (Our Work, World Vision website, n.d.). This implies that all organisations work in numerous contexts, not only culturally but also environmentally, posing different project challenges. This is imperative to this research because different organisations have different exit strategies for the same contexts, thus implying a different degree of importance for each factor in decision-making processes.

Thirdly, each organisation, though all globally operating agencies, has structures that vary but are comparable. In other words, they have multiple tiers in their organisational structure, thus affecting the decision-making processes going on in these organisations.

\(^2\) Data on financial accountability and annual financial reviews can be found on the websites of the respective organisations: www.msf.org; www.rescue.org; www.wvi.org.
The size of the organisation is thus very important, as it will determine in some way the structure of this decision-making process. An interesting part of this research is therefore finding out where and how such operational decisions take place, and whether the organisational structure affects this decision-making.

1.3. Limitations

The limitations of this research lie partly as a consequence of the methodology described above. Firstly, the literature research did not yield many results; though there are more frequent calls for research in this area (Gelsdorf, 2011; 2012; Tavakoli 2011; Personal communication Greenblott, 2013), the amount of literature related to exit strategies in humanitarian relief projects through different methods of research was not as much as hoped for. Though this indicates a higher contribution to the academic community in the humanitarian sector, it should be noted that the research is not built upon as many sources that had been originally thought of.

Secondly, in order for this study to be successive, a closer insight into humanitarian organisations is needed. Though a literature review has been conducted, these sources tend to be constructed in a formalised manner that may not reveal information that is needed in order to do this comparative analysis. Thus interviews have been conducted and are used for this part of the research. These interviews will be a more insightful source of information, yet it does mean taking into account the perspectives and positions of the interviewees.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the theoretical framework presented has been created and not replicated. This innovative approach of research thus yields a unique result, however it is difficult to prove or test these results against anything previously done. Though following onto different decision-making theories, the hypothesis presented is drawn from a fusion of theories and findings done in the literature that was available. The research is intended to uncover a way to analyse current approaches to exit strategies, however it should not be regarded as the ‘only’ or the ‘right’ way.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework consists of the combination of theoretical concepts on decision-making and international relations theories, namely Rationalism, Social Constructivism and Marxism. The outcome of this integration of these two quite different fields of theory is an illustrative model that is representative of decision-making patterns in organisations in general. This will be the basic theoretical background that will be used in the analysis, and lays the foundation for further research.

In order to arrive at the complete theoretical framework, sub-questions are posed in each section. These can be summarised as the following:

1) How do organisations make decisions?
2) What are the main motivators behind these decisions?
3) What are the factors affecting the exit strategy decision?
4) What are the motivational bases of each of the factors that influence the exit strategy decision?

International Relations theory and organisational decision-making theory are introduced and discussed in order to provide a better insight into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of decision-making and their processes. More specifically, the key questions answered in this section are formulated as follows:

1. How do organisations in general make decisions?
2. What are the main motivational factors and influencers behind these decisions?

In order to answer these questions, the theories of James March (1958, 1994) are reviewed. March’s hypothesis and rationale is one that is can be used as being relevant to the case of humanitarian organisations and their operational decisions on exit strategies, compared to other basic organisational theories such as Taylorism (1914). The distinction between strategic and operational decisions that March makes is crucial to this research, and it is one of the core questions analysed in this paper.
This theoretical model is then applied to the subject of exit strategies, which has many influencing factors. As a part of this theoretical framework, the influencing factors will be identified through different types of literature available on the subject. Afterwards, the factors are integrated with the theoretical model to form a comprehensive theoretical framework for the forthcoming data analysis.

2.1. Organisational and decision-making theory

2.1.1. How do organisations in general make decisions?

The start- and ending point of James March’s his theory is that organisations are ultimately based on the decisions that individuals of that organisation take (Hernes, 2008: 99). In this sense, an organisation is more of an official term for an assembly of people who share the same ideas, goals or principles (March & Simon, 1958: 1). These initial positions then later on evolve into a series of strategies, missions or mandates derived from whatever the purpose of the organisation may be.

The application of this theory to humanitarian organisations quickly becomes clear when studying the history of each organisation. The decision by Henry Dunand to help wounded soldiers that were left on the battlefield of Solferino was the inevitable start of what is now perhaps the most prestigious humanitarian organisation today, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The decision by Reverent Pierce to help a child in China was the start of what is today Worldvision. The decision to go against the principle of impartiality in the Biafran War was the start of Médicins Sans Frontiers. The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) was created after the members of the General Assembly voted to adopt Resolution 46/182. Thus the foundation of every single humanitarian organisation can be traced back to a decision made by an individual or a collective group of people at a certain point in time. As a consequence, the mandate of the humanitarian organisation should in this line of thinking influence to some extent decisions taken in the organisation.

An organisation is then viewed as a group of decision-makers. These decision-makers share a common interest in making use of an idea, which will result into the coming
together to create or respect a certain decision-making pattern. This pattern, however structured it may be, will always start off on the basis of incoherence: as the world and everything around us individuals is incoherent and chaotic, so is the functioning of the decision-making patterns within these entities. If patterns do happen to be consistent, Hernes explains, it would owe it to chance rather than the structure of the organisation. This in turn guarantees the organisation’s survival in its environment. Organisations therefore appear to the outside world to be coherent, structured, units yet when regarding decision-making patterns, this is a different story (March, 1994).

What is distinctive about this theory is the reverse logic that incoherence or disorder is the basis in which organisations operate in. This dismisses ‘conventional’ theorists of thinking that there is a ‘natural order of things’ (see for example Hall, 1984), that some entities or units hang together naturally. Instead, this perspective proposes that things come together through organisations – in order words, order is created through organisations, not orchestrated from the outside.

March then follows up on this philosophy by dividing decisions into different types and degrees of importance (March, 1994). He then goes on to an analysis of the factors that might constitute to different types of decisions: from the degree of connectivity to consequentiality to the timing of decisions. What is important to note is that there is a difference in importance and influence between and within decisions – whilst the one might not affect the status quo of the organisation at all, the other might alter the course of an organisation completely.

The distinction in decisions that March describes is a core element in this study and these ideas are further developed. This research specifically focuses on what March likes to call ‘strategic decisions’ and other, more mechanical, decisions referred to as ‘operational decisions’ (Lune, 2010). In the context of humanitarian organisations, strategic decisions refer to the mandate or mission of the organisation, as they are regarded as the main goal or raison d’être of the organisation. These have a large impact on operational decisions, as they define the main goals of a project or program as well as defining the boundaries of operations.
However this study parts from March’s theory when analysing the ‘why’ in decision-making. Whilst March (1994) analyses decisions on the basis of what physical factors influence a decision-making process, this paper analyses more specifically the relationship between the different types of decision-making processes and motivational nature of decisions. This was found to be more appropriate for the analysis of not only the internal decision-making processes, but also for the different types of factors. This study uses a back-to-basics approach, where basic three theories of Rational, Social Constructivist and Marxist International Relations theories are applied in order to explain the motivational basis of decision-making processes in humanitarian organisations.

2.1.2. What motivates a decision?

Though the motivation behind an organisational decision-making process might be the result of a myriad of factors, it is argued that decisions in organisations have a motivational ground in any of three key International Relations theories: Rationalism, Socio-constructivism and Marxism. These three theories in International Relations analyse the international system in such a way that actors have a specific motivation for acting the way they do. Through such perspectives, these different theories then attempt to predict how certain entities in the international system will react in certain situations. For example, in the Social Constructivist view on International Relations, it is predominantly social norms and ideas related to behavioural perceptions that shapes interaction on the international stage, whilst for Marxism international politics can be entirely analysed in terms of economic motive (Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2008). For this study, this means that the motivation of an organisational decision has its grounds in ultimately those three strands of motivation:

1. **Efficiency-based decisions** (rational decisions): This approach in International Relations assumes that actors on the international stage, which includes states but also international organisations and firms, all make decisions on certain calculations (Glaser, 2010). The types of decisions that are based on this kind of analysis are aimed at increasing efficiency, control or productiveness of the organisation. The earliest modern
advocates for rational organisational systems were Fayd, Ford and Taylor, who were of the viewpoint that decision-making should sweep aside the emotional, ‘personal, ethical and legal worries’ in order to become a truly rational system (Lune, 2008).

Although people would like to believe that their decisions are all based on effectiveness, productivity or efficiency, reality often shows a different picture. An insufficient overview on the consequences of such decisions on future operations might turn out to be disastrous if the respective organisation would want to start a new operation in the same area, for example. Furthermore, as Mintzberg also argues, decisions based on productivity usually do not take into account the effects of this efficiency on its environment (Mintzberg, 1973). As such, rational decisions are typically calculated, pre-determined decisions based on what has proven in the past to be the most effective. Rational decisions in humanitarian organisations thus do not always have the desired outcome.

A common reason for this is that the turbulent conditions under which decisions are to be made have inherent uncertainties that humanitarian organisations may not be able to handle efficiently or consistently, and hence the outcomes of the decisions may even end up being contrary to the goals of the organisations. A typical rational decision-making process in humanitarian organisations is for example: the setting up of a project cycle, where the target outcomes of the project cycle are being calculated against what is possible in the realities of the context. More concretely, the calculation of the delivery of stock items in an emergency situation, or the scheduling of activities within the proposed budget are all components of a project cycle that are most likely based on efficiency (IFRC, 2011).

2. **Value-based decisions** (Social Constructivist decisions): In the Social Constructivist perspective, the international system is analysed on the basis of human activity. In this sense, all politics in the international system are socially constructed (Wendt, 1992). Decisions in this perspective are decided upon a certain set of values, or commonly accepted principles, or morals held by the organisation. In this sense, this is the complete opposite of the rational approach: organisations are viewed as human
systems, created as an effort to organise the values or commonly accepted principles or morals held by the organisation that the organisation stands for (Barnard, 1938). Barnard was one of the first scholars in management theory to point out that decision-making, a responsibility that is assigned to managers within an organisation, should be mainly concerned with the workers rather than the work. This means considering giving workers an incentive to work harder, for example a bonus on top of a salary (ibid). Decision-making in this approach also happens more fluidly in organisations and is based on input from various levels, as it is assumed that everyone in the organisation is working towards the same goals or values. Therefore input in decision-making is more varied and decision-making processes tend to be longer.

Value-based decision-making in humanitarian organisations is quite common, as many humanitarian organisations are principled, value-based organisations. These values or principles might ultimately be turned into the mandate or mission of a humanitarian organisation. An example of a value-based decision in a humanitarian organisation is thus for example the decision of the ICRC to not intervene at an emergency without the permission of a country's government, though this might be contrary to helping the alleviation of suffering in the same country.

3. Economic decisions (Marxist decisions): These are decisions that strive towards the most economically profitable outcome. For Karl Marx (1867) this immediately implied the exploitation of those who work for the organisation, however it can also be the exploitation of a general situation. This might be confused with rational decisions because some efficiency-based decisions are geared towards making the most profit from the product or service that a company or organisation is selling. This will occur at a certain point in time, as virtually every economic system in the world is a profit-based system.

The difference in between these two lies in the fact that economic decisions are not necessarily efficient. A decision taken on the foundation of profit might impact negatively on the organisation's operations, especially in the case of humanitarian organisations. Economic decisions impact heavily on a humanitarian organisation's image and funds, as
it directly contests the non-profit status many humanitarian organisations have. Furthermore, because the value-based aspect is often emphasised in the humanitarian sector, it sometimes overshadows the fact that humanitarian organisations, much like any other organisation in other sectors, also make many decisions based on economic survival. An example of an economic decision like this is the continuation of certain emergency aid programs as a generator of cash flows, though its positive impact and program efficiency might be somewhat contested. This is exactly what happened in the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in Afghanistan with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the period between 2004 and 2008 (Russell, 2010).

2.1.3. Arriving at a theoretical model

The prioritisation of certain decisions in humanitarian organisations will have a motivational basis that can be found in the three elements described above. This does not necessarily mean that every decision made in an organisation has one motivational ground. On the contrary, most organisational decisions will have multiple motivational bases. Yet most organisational decisions will have a more prevalent mechanism based on the motivational factors described.

The organisational decision mechanisms described above, however, may not be robust enough for the analysis of the findings of the data research. A visualisation of the interplay of the influencing elements is a better method to show what exactly is meant by the description above. As already mentioned, there are three basic natures described: efficiency, value and economics influencing natures of decision-making that determine an organisational decision. The different basics of decision-making have an expanding or contracting nature to themselves, and can therefore not be represented as static. A Venn-diagram is used to show the role of these influencing factors, although the relevance of the overlap areas is not a priority. It is more a demonstration of how close – or far apart – the relevant decision-making influences are, and how they relate to the organisations’ ability to make decisions in the context of the situation. These basic natures cannot be
regarded as monotone directions, and thus these units should be depicted overlapping one another. From the discussion above, the following illustration has been constructed to show how the motivational bases can be represented:

![Figure 1: motivational bases for decision-making](image1)

This illustration shows a perfect balance of the motivational grounds but this will probably rarely be the case, as factors that affect the different motivational bases will have a differing degree of importance depending on the situation. For example, an exit strategy being driven by fund depletion at the end of a project cycle can be illustrated as follows:

![Figure 2: Example of decision-making pattern](image2)
2.1.4. The role of structure in decision-making processes

Many scholars across various sectors agree that organisational structure impacts heavily on decision-making activity within organisations (Gilmore, 1998). However, as with countless other academic subjects, many scholars have a different definition as to what “organisational structure” is.

Mintzberg (1983) defines it as the result of the way in which the division of labour in is divided diverse tasks and the coordination in between these tasks in order to reach the overall aim of the company. In contrast, O'Regan, Sims & Ghobadian (2005) simply refer to the degree of concentration of authority and power within a firm. The most appropriate definition found for this research has been written by Wang & Ahmed (2003), who see organisational structure as “the skeletal structure for all organisational decisions and processes”. They therefore strongly advocate that changes in an organisational structure will also entail changes in decision-making (ibid).

It is assumed that, as an organisation grows, so will the patterns of decision-making change and evolve. The humanitarian sector has seen a massive growth in the past couple of decades, and continues to expand every year, with an average growth percentage of 6% per year (Walker & Russ, 2010). As humanitarian organisations grow larger, so do their bureaucracy and their structures. Whether decisions are rational, value or economy-based, if there are more actors involved in the decision-making processes, the decision-making patterns are involuntarily subjected to change (Taylor, 1974).

As there are a multitude of factors involved in the decision-making processes on exit strategies, it is important how the decisions are taken within an organisation and how these factors affect those decisions. This approach thus goes beyond the traditional perspective on project effectiveness evaluation. Looking at the basic motivators behind decisions whilst simultaneously looking at the structure of the decision-making process within an organisation, provides a clearer overview on exit strategy decisions as well as organisational approaches towards operational decisions.
2.2. Factors that influence exit strategies

In this section, the literature that exists about exit strategies in humanitarian relief projects is examined with the purpose of discovering which factors are regarded as important in the decision for an exit strategy. The question to answer in this section can be phrased as follows:

What are the factors affecting the exit strategy decision in humanitarian relief projects?

This is approached first by a review on manuals and guidelines found on exit strategies for humanitarian emergency projects. Thereafter, an examination of literature written on exit strategies in humanitarian interventions is provided, in order to find additional elements that guidelines might have missed.

The result of this section is the identification of the general factors that influence the decision of the timing and manner of an exit strategy, according to the literature available. Articles and documentation are reviewed on the basis of finding elements of different factors that influence an exit strategy, and thus will not necessarily explore their essence or purpose. This will provide a basis to analyse the case study in.

2.2.1. Studying exit strategies in the current literature available

A critique resonated by Hoffman & Weiss (2006) is that there are not enough evaluations and literature written on the operational side of humanitarian action. "Lessons learnt" mostly become “lessons spurned” (ibid, p. 198) and not enough attention has been paid to implement different strategies or operational procedures. This is especially true in the case of civil-military cooperation, at which Larry Minear noticed that evaluations and critiques are known, repetitive occurrences (Minear, 2002). Yet, Minear and Hoffman & Weiss also recognise that there are many similarities between military science and humanitarian literature.

In the case of exit strategies, papers written on this subject from a military perspective are useful as they illustrate and articulate some of the same dilemmas and concepts humanitarian relief operations have (Benson & Thrash, 1996; Hardin & D’Amore, 2005).
Firstly, both actors are usually outsiders entering a precarious situation. Adding to that, both actors carry additional resources or an additional role into the local context, and both are meant to be in this context for a finite amount of time. Secondly, whilst differing in political objectives and purposes completely, both actors operate in a similar way, in the sense that they both have a project cycle, a mission and guidelines and procedures to follow.

Though the nature and the relations between these two different observations might be a completely different story, the similarities above justify looking into scholarly literature concerning this somewhat operational subject. The simple fact is that, whilst scholarly literature on exit strategies within the humanitarian sphere is thin on the ground, articles written on exit strategies for the military are more readily available (see Rose, 1998; Records, 2001; Western & Goldstein, 2011), which provides an equally qualified platform to explore this subject in.

Hoffman & Weiss (2006) ascribe the lack of evaluative and retrospective literature on humanitarian operations in general to the fact that humanitarian organisations do not have the luxury or feel no need to ‘waste’ their human resources and budget to support these endeavours. However, a personal observation confirmed by one of the interviewees for this research on the topic of exit strategies is that many organisations are not eager to share operational manuals or evaluative information on exit strategies, as there is largely a lack internally in both. This can therefore be viewed as an additional reason for the lack of literature on exit strategies in humanitarian organisations.

2.2.2. Exit strategy guidelines: the starting point of analysis

The exit strategy guidelines for humanitarian projects publically accessible and found for this research are all written between the years 2000 and 2005, except for the Global Protection Cluster guideline, which was written in 2012. Though some of this material may be regarded as a little outdated, most of them are still the most useful documents found for this study. One has to also take into account the establishment of the UN Cluster System in 2006, which outlines different coordination mechanisms.
The guidelines were chosen on the basis that the documents are solely about exit strategy implementation and/or practice. The guidelines found and used for this study are therefore documents that help identify relevant factors on planning and executing an exit strategy. These factors will hereafter be used when analysing the different case studies.

The first thing noticeable by all documents researched (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005; WFP, 2004; Global Protection Cluster, 2012; IASC, 1997) is the definition and perception of the purpose of an exit strategy. The overall key theme found in each single document is that an exit strategy is meant to be an approach to deal with longer-term issues. Concepts such as rehabilitation, long-term recovery, development, durable solutions, and sustainability are all included in the explanation of the purpose or goals of the different guidelines. The most appropriate definition of the purpose of an exit strategy can be found in the C-SAFE guideline, quoting a World Food Program (WFP) presentation, because it confirms what has been assumed before; sustainability of project impact is one of the, or perhaps the most important, aim of a good exit strategy:

“The purpose of an exit strategy is not to hasten the exit – exit is not valuable for its own sake – but to improve the chance of sustainable outcomes for the program” (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005: 7).

Another key feature in the purpose of an exit strategy expressed by the WFP and C-SAFE guidelines is the insurance that the manner of exit should not hinder the advancements the project has made. Furthermore, all guidelines also clearly state that having an early-determined exit strategy will make the emergency response project run smoother. Having an ad-hoc formulation of an exit strategy is thus described as “likely to be more haphazard” for the project (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005: 17). This is because ad-hoc exit strategies mostly do not have the capability of taking into account longer-term outcomes. They are also, by rule of thumb, not as well implemented as planned exit strategies; not enough resources or funding is allocated to this part of the project, and not enough time is left in relief projects to execute the exit phase (ibid). All guidelines
therefore advise to start the planning or formulation of an exit strategy to start as early as possible in the project cycle, as to have a clear direction to work towards.

Thus a first element to be noted from this is that the project cycle is an important factor influencing exit strategies, because the stage or the progress of a project will ultimately affect the decision of which strategy to implement and if the timing for this decision is right. The C-SAFE and WFP guidelines focus particularly on the project objectives or outcomes, as this is what the project cycle is oriented towards. However, others argue that planning and timing a project cycle is unreasonable, because in some projects and contexts objectives cannot be simply planned on a timescale (see Darcy & Hoffman, 2003 for example). A similar argument has been made by the scholarly military literature, as it shall be shown in the sub-section below.

A crucial factor that accompanies the project cycle is the context in which the project finds itself. The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines both point towards needs assessment to evaluate the contextual settings, however all guidelines point towards a variety of different issues within the context that influence an exit strategy (Global Protection Cluster, 2012; IASC, 1997). The WFP guideline has a concrete list of contextual factors that need to be considered when planning an exit:

- Nature or shock of crisis;
- Vulnerability of the population;
- Types of assets depleted;
- Regional context; and
- Access to partnerships” (WFP, 2005: 8-10).

This is a good list of concrete examples that need to be taken into account when considering the context factor, as it includes a variety of issues that involve this factor. Though broad, these are all vital issues related to the context to take into consideration on deciding an exit strategy. All of the guidelines involved also indicate the need for a (preferably local) partner organisation in case of a take-over of the project. This is
logically a very desirable element in the exit strategy, according to the C-SAFE, WFP and GPC guidelines, as it ensures the sustainability of the desired project outcomes, or at least the continuation of the project itself (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005; WFP, 2005; Global Protection Cluster, 2012).

After the context factor comes a factor stressed more by the IASC guideline, which is the external communication going on in between different actors in the same context. The amount of coordination present in any given context certainly influences the decision for an exit strategy because decent coordination will give the people involved in making the decision a more structured view of the context. High quality coordination between a humanitarian organisation and a government agency, for example, implies that the infrastructure of the respective government involved is stable and in place, which is regarded by humanitarian organisations such as the WFP as a program/project outcome itself (IASC, 1997).

Besides external communication, internal coordination and capacity in the organisation is also an important factor. The C-SAFE guideline cites a few of the typical problems that are associated with lack of organisational capacity; for example, when there is not enough human resource capacity, or when there is a high turnover of staff in the emergency project. In both instances, the organisation is limited with its exit strategy options, and will most likely not be able to execute the exit strategy properly. The negative effect of a high staff turnover in a relief project is that staff is not physically involved with the project, and thus will have limited knowledge of certain influencing factors. This in turn will influence the overall sustainability of project outcomes, as exit strategy decisions are taken in a more limited capacity (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005: 18).

All guidelines also very clearly concern themselves with the financial issues involved in operational decisions regarding the exit. This will include a variety of cost elements, including personnel costs, but also resources, the program budget and donor policies and responses to any given project. These all have an important influence and are sometimes even the deciding factor in many exit strategy decisions. The C-SAFE guideline
specifically discusses the traditional situations of deciding exit strategies only when funds are depleted, or when exit activities are not budgeted for (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005: 17). If funding is not allocated for exit strategy activities, the sustainability of project outcomes might be endangered, as discussed previously above. Thus, the factor of funding and resources is also an issue that is heavy weighted in the factors of exit strategy decisions (ibid).

Lastly, a factor noticeable in the GPC Good Practices paper is the role of the mandate or mission of the organisation or project in exit strategies. One of the Global Protection Cluster’s main remarks on the pre-conditions on exit or transition strategies was the need for clearer mandates (Global Protection Cluster, 2012: 1). The logic behind this is that the mandate or even mission of an organisation would demarcate the project, thus clarifying what needs to be done as an exit strategy. A question that arises, sparked by the research, is then: does the mandate, or mission, of an organisation demarcate the exit strategy of different projects? This would imply a confirmation of March his theory in organisational decision-making, as the mandate or mission factor would already set the conditions in which organisations leave their emergency relief projects. This question, however, shall be left until the data analysis section of the paper, as a closer insight into the organisations with different types of mandates is needed.

2.2.3. The military perspective: a useful insight

Much of the scholarly literature on exit strategies in humanitarian interventions has been written at the beginning of the 2000’s, after the wave of disastrous US and UN humanitarian adventures from the 1990s, such as the Somalia and Kosovo interventions. Originally, much of the literature on the topic was almost wholly focused on US military behaviour and analysis, which should be taken into account as the US perspective might be different from other military perspectives.

The whole notion of an “exit strategy” only first appeared in US foreign and military policies after 1993 and was a term borrowed from the business world (Rose, 1998). This means that the term itself has not been around for long, at least in the military literature.
Therefore, commenting on this somewhat new concept, scholars and military strategists alike came up with a number of observations worthwhile noting, and applicable to Humanitarian Action.

Correlations in between the two fields of study, namely that of Humanitarian Action and Humanitarian Intervention and military strategy, are clearly present. For example, Johnson (2002) notes that the reason for a bad exit, as has been repeatedly demonstrated by the US in various conflicts, is because not enough time and effort is spent on the exit strategy when planning the project cycle. In his article, Johnson illustrates his argument by looking at the various humanitarian interventions where the US forces have operated. He noted that in each case of a somewhat ‘bad’ exit, guidance on how to develop and execute an exit strategy was also largely absent. The consequences of this poor planning were, for example in the case of Somalia, a hasty implemented exit strategy. This damaged the success previously gained in the mission. This has also been stressed by the CSAFE, IASC and WFP guidelines, which echo the same line of argumentation throughout their content.

Adding on to the topic of planning the project cycle, Rose (2001) also noticed the problems of having a timeframe attached to the mission. In his view, the success of a military mission will largely depend on the commitment shown towards this mission. Rose goes on to argue that, putting a timeframe on a project cycle is illogical, as the success of a military mission will depend on being able to fulfil the political objectives in a certain time limit. Therefore, an exit strategy in a humanitarian intervention should focus on completing the mission’s objectives, rather then a tactic for a ‘quick way out’. Western & Goldstein (2011) similarly assert that an exit strategy in the exit strategy should not hold to a timeframe, but keep pace with the progress made in the given context. They argue that an exit strategy for these interventions should be refined to a ‘transition strategy’. One can quickly detect the parallels that can be drawn between this line of argumentation and the mainstream literature circulating the humanitarian circles, which also stress the need for more consideration of the context and sustainability of project outcomes in those contexts (Christoplos, 2004).
Furthermore, nearly all scholars researched also noted that the context is perhaps the most crucial factor in terms of an exit strategy (Johnson, 2002; Records, 2001; Rose 1998; Western & Goldstein 2011; Tellis 1996). Jeffrey Records (2001) goes so far as to say that planning an exit strategy in the context of war is ineffectual, as this volatile context does not allow rational strategic decisions to be made, especially not in advance. This line of argumentation is also used a lot in humanitarian organisations in their exit strategy determination, and is seen as the primary reason as to why many humanitarian organisations still continue to work with ad-hoc decisions-based exit strategies (Darcy & Hoffman, 2003).

Going back to the different influencing factors in exit strategies, Records notes that, on the different influencing factors in exit strategies, the context of emotional impact is sometimes severely overlooked. Moreover, many decisions in these contexts appear to be made on pure, irrational emotions. Records goes on to postulate that, had decisions been on purely rational reasons, Winston Churchill would have neatly cut a deal with Adolf Hitler and avoided British involvement in the Second World War entirely. Using this line of argumentation, it is important to know who is in charge of taking the decision in the first place, and their involvement in the context.

This imaginative example illustrates the importance of the individual taking the decision. This highlights the human factor in a humanitarian organisation. The human factor refers to the individuals responsible of taking a decision. The problem with this factor, however, is that it is difficult to measure. To what degree a decision to handover or phase out is based on the emotions of the individual(s) that have taken that decision will not be clear, or explicitly mentioned. Evaluative reports that discuss exit strategies (see for example Group URD, 2012) have not mentioned this, nor do the guidelines and policy documents (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005; WFP, 2004; IASC, 1997; Global Protection Cluster, 2012). This means this factor might be harder to find in documents in the analysis, and therefore harder to determine its exact influence.

A last factor that the military scholarly literature on humanitarian interventions mentions is the role of the media and general public opinion. In other words, the general visibility of
the operation and the context itself. Tellis (1996) was the first to mention that the exit strategies of middle- and small-scaled humanitarian interventions were less clearly formulated because of the focus of public opinion and the media on larger, heavy-impact humanitarian interventions. The easy explanation for this however lies in the suddenly concentrated focus on exit strategies after the fiascos of Somalia and Rwanda and their respective humanitarian interventions in the beginning of the 1990’s.

2.2.4. Arriving at the main factors that influence exit strategy decision-making

Eight different “factors” can be identified from the literature that contribute to the exit strategy determination:

1. Project cycle – The project cycle has been indicated by some of the exit strategy guidelines above as the most important determining factor of an exit strategy. This comprises all the mechanical elements in the preparation and execution of a project: planning, timing and measurement of project outcomes are thus constitutive of this factor.

2. Internal (organisational) coordination and capacity – This refers to internal coordination and communication. Organisational structure falls under this category. This factor also includes organisational capacity, as it is orchestrated through internal coordination.

3. Funding and resources – This category comprises of all financial issues involved in a humanitarian relief project. This comprises a wide range of sub-factors, ranging from donor policy, through financial delivery to acquisition of resources and depletion of assets, etc. In other words, everything that involves program costs and financing.

4. Visibility – This involves the presentation and perception of a given project to outside observers. This includes media coverage and attention as well as domestic and international public opinion.

5. Mission/Mandate – This factor is clearly and simple the mission or mandate of the respective organisation and the project itself. Though this factor seems to be
obvious, this factor seems to be easily overlooked because it is more of an underlying decision driver rather than a direct, more practical factor.

6. **Context** – This factor refers to the situational issues that influence exit strategy decisions. These usually comprise of the local context and the nature and extent of the crisis concerned. The context factor also entails specific contextual matters such as the availability of local partners and needs assessment results.

7. **External (humanitarian) Communication** – This aspect entails all coordination outside the respective organisation. This includes not only coordination and communication between other actors such as the government and the military, but also between different humanitarian organisations.

8. **The human factor** – This factor comprises of the personal situation and emotions regarding the individual(s) taking the exit strategy decision. This is often easily forgotten in evaluations and analysis in humanitarian action.

Each factor will have a different degree of importance, depending on the degree of prioritisation of each of these factors by the respective organisation. Some factors might have a very important role to play in the exit strategy decision, whilst others might not make a difference at all. This is also one of the main issues analysed in this study: which factor takes prioritisation in the different case study organisations? In order to complete the theoretical framework, these factors discovered in the different literature will be used in the next section so that data can be analysed accordingly.

### 2.3. Aligning the theory with the literature review

This section introduces the final model that will be used in the data analysis. To arrive at such a model, the following question is phrased:

What are the motivational bases of each of the factors that influence the exit strategy decision?

The question thus concretely asks how the two sections above fit into the theoretical model illustrated earlier. In order to provide a comprehensive overview, this section is structured as follows: firstly a discussion on the factors extracted from the literature
review is conducted, and aligned with the theory described in the previous sections. From this consideration, another nature, namely the contextual nature, of the influencing factors is introduced and explained. This is integrated in order to form the complete theoretical framework.

2.3.1. Determining the nature of the factors influencing exit strategy decision-making

Most of the factors that will have an influence on the decision of how to exit and when, have a motivational basis grounded in the approaches described above. These can be summarised as being:

- Efficiency-based: decisions based on cost-benefit analysis;
- Economy-based: decisions driven for the most profitable economic outcome;
- Value-based: decisions based on certain principles and values.

This conclusion can be logically deduced when examining each individual factor in light of the theory described.

Starting with the first basis, efficiency, this basis can be found in the first two factors. The project cycle in humanitarian relief projects typically has four stages: Project Initiation, Project planning, Project Execution and Project Closure (MPMM Project Management Life Cycle website, n.d.). The facets concerning the project cycle are invariably pre-determined and are reviewed and discussed regularly, and hence invoke a rational process of decision-making. The project cycle factor also has an economic aspect to it as the planning of a project is accompanied with resource and financial plans. However the project cycle is more concerned with what the most efficient way of execution of a project is, rather than whether it is the most profitable economic outcome. The motivational basis for this factor is thus efficiency-based. Pre-determined or planned exit strategies will also be done at the planning stage of a project, pointing towards a more rational process if exit strategies are decided upon in this stage. The second efficiency-based factor, internal coordination and capacity, comprises everything to do with the organisational input into the project – this also includes the organisational capacity. An
example of organisational capacity is for example staff turnover, or the human resourcing of a relief project.

Furthermore, internal organisational coordination will be based upon the structure of the organisation; whether the organisation has a country office in the respective country it is operating in will be if importance in this factor, for example. Operational decisions involving internal coordination are mostly based upon efficiency, as this factor almost entirely points to the productivity of the organisation. When a project is up and running but the organisation no longer has the physical capacity to run it, an exit strategy would be based upon the (in)efficiency of the organisation.

Thereafter, there are two economy-based factors. Funding and resources has by far its largest motivational base in the economical side of decision-making. Though a rational process can be used involving funding, much of it remains about having the most profitable economic outcome. Other decisional grounds might be involved when, for example, selecting donors or setting up a donor policy. In this example, the decision to accept governmental funding or not, might be an entirely value-based decision. However in the case of operational decisions, the elements that comprise this factor will always be based on getting the most economically profitable outcome, or if that is simply not achievable, the least negative outcome.

The fourth factor, visibility, seems at first a circumstantial factor. In the end, no one can predict what an external observer will post or write about. Yet after some closer consideration, it becomes clear that this factor is closely tied to funding, and also has a large economical basis when it is involved in decision-making. As British newspaper The Guardian illustrated with the Somalia famine response, the increase of media coverage of this crisis was almost incidental with the amount of funding pledged towards the famine (the Guardian, February 22, 2012). Funding pledges thus peaked at almost the exact same time that media coverage on this situation peaked. This illustration is by far not unique; others have protested about the bias of media and direction of funding towards these situations covered, leaving many other crisis situations forgotten - hence the origination of the term “forgotten crisis“ (Danish Refugee Council, 2002).
The fifth factor, the mandate or mission of the organisation, has its profound motivational basis in values, as those are what the humanitarian organisation’s mandate or mission is traditionally based upon. For example, for the Samaritan’s Purse, the Christian faith is one of their main motivators. The decision to then work with the local church rather than the local government, which might have the capacity to reach more beneficiaries in a community, would thus be based on the communality of a value – in this case the Christian faith. Thus, decisions that are in line with the mission or mandate of an organisation are not grounded on efficiency or economic gain – they are based on the values that the particular humanitarian organisation strives to work for.

2.3.2. Adding another nature in the theoretical framework

Though the theory in the previous sections accounted for the motivational grounds of decisions, it did not account for those factors that do influence decision-making, but are not inherently based in the decision-making itself. In the sixth factor, the context, it is clear that no decision-making attributes can be ascribed to this factor. Though ultimately affecting all motivational grounds described in decision-making, the context itself is not grounded in any of them. Instead, it sets the conditions of which each organisational decision has to be taken, affecting each motivational ground. Illustrations of the effect of the context on the motivational grounds are most clear with a sudden change of context. For example, the sudden kidnapping and killing of aid workers of a humanitarian organisation in a country somewhere can halt the presence of the organisation in the respective country, thus entirely shifting the basis on which the exit strategy decision-making is based. This is exactly what happened with Médecins Sans Frontières in Somalia in August 2013, where the decision to exit was taken against recurring events of the kidnapping of their aid workers in the last couple of years (Doucleff, 2013).

The seventh factor, external coordination, seems to be contextual factor, as it is dependent upon outside actors. However, most external coordination is actually based upon rational choice decision-making. Though coordination with external actors includes a variety of actions, it mostly consists of negotiating operating terms with other actors,
including the terms of a handover. As Alfredson & Cungu (2008) state in the context of negotiation and negotiation-theory, much of this subject in general starts from rational choice theory of outweighing the costs and benefits against each other. It would seem likely that this factor would also have its basis in efficiency-oriented decision-making. Yet, this argument is deceptive, as it presumes that all actors with which the organisation is dealing with will have the same motivational grounds for acting.

Therefore, because the motivational basis of decision-making is very much dependent upon the nature of communication with other parties, decisions can simultaneously also be value- or economically based. For example, a humanitarian organisation can be operating in a country in which the respective government has offered help to distribute aid goods – despite running directly against certain principles of the organisation. Coordination with the government in this case will therefore be of a value-based nature. This example illustrates therefore that the external communication factor is a contextual factor, as it can have an influence in all three different factors.

The last, eighth factor, the human factor, is difficult to base in the motivational decision-making paradigm. Though not entirely contextual, it is highly dependent upon the context and varies from person to person. Whilst some decision-makers will be more prone towards a rational thinking process, others might lean more towards value- or economically-based decisions. Because this factor is too dependent upon the context, it might be more suited as a contextual factor. Yet this is where the structure of the decision-making process becomes more important. Whilst attributing to internal capacity and coordination, the decision-making structure in an organisation also greatly aids or diminishes the influence of the human factor.

It does so in various ways. For example, when operational decision-making authority is delegated towards the field, the observation of events will be more accurate, but might program-focused at the same time. The reverse may be the case if the decision is swiftly taken at senior management without any consideration from the field. It should also be taken in consideration that the person, or group of people, involved in the decision-making process might have personal involvement in the project, especially in emergency
situations when tensions are running high. Though illustrating the extreme case, it shows what influence the formal or informal position a person has towards the situation.

2.3.3. Putting the pieces together

With a last nature of influencing factors included, the illustration of the theoretical model changes slightly. As the contextual factors can have an effect in all of the other motivational grounds, they will be included in the visualisation of the theoretical model as the following:

![Figure 3: Complete theoretical framework](image)

The surface of the context circle expands or contracts according to the amount of influence it has over the other motivational grounds in an exit strategy decision. An exit strategy that has most motivational influences in efficiency, where the project cycle predetermines the exit and is followed accordingly, disregarding contextual factors, will thus look like this:
Whilst an exit strategy based on purposely one factor can be simply represented with the following illustration (Figure 5), because that fact then overpowers everything else and therefore becomes the context:

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter started off with explanations in decision-making theory of why certain decisions are prioritised in organisations, and proposes three basic motivational grounds for decision-making: efficiency, value and economy based. Thereafter, the factors that are influential in determining an exit strategy were introduced through literature from
different disciplines. This included identifying eight different factors. Through the identification of these factors, it was also established that pre-determined, planned exit strategies produce a longer, more sustainable project outcome in emergency relief projects. This is instrumental for the discussion that will follow onto the data analysis.

These factors were then found to have either a motivational basis as stipulated in the theory, or to have a contextual nature that cannot be attributed to the motivations in decision-making. These natures were then displayed in Figures 3, 4 and 5, which showed how different forms of decision-making patterns are represented. The result is a theoretical model that will be instrumental in answering the overall research question, of how humanitarian organisations decide on an exit strategy.
3. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter analyses the case studies according to the data found of each organisation examined. This is done by firstly giving a brief introduction of the organisations, followed by an analysis of the eight different factors affecting the exit strategy in the organisations. Thereafter, a discussion of these factors is conducted, after which a representation of the theoretical model can be constructed for each of the organisations. The question answered in this chapter is formulated as follows:

- Based on the data found, what is the decision-making pattern regarding exit strategies in each of the organisations (MSF, IRC and World Vision) examined?

This chapter thus answers the main research question of how humanitarian organisations decide on their exit strategies, using the theoretical framework devised in the previous chapter.

3.1. Introducing and understanding the organisational approaches to exit strategies

This section takes a closer look at the organisations selected as case studies. After an introduction to the background of each organisation, the operational procedures of each organisation’s approach to exit strategies shall be described. The commonalities and differences of the three organisations had been somewhat alluded to already in the introduction. This brief description is instrumental to understanding the organisations selected as case studies for data analysis.

3.1.1. Introducing MSF

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), also more commonly known as Doctors Without Borders, is a humanitarian organisation set up in 1971. Its purpose and existence is described as the following:
“Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international, independent, medical humanitarian organisation that delivers emergency aid to people affected by armed conflict, epidemics, natural disasters and exclusion from healthcare. MSF offers assistance to people based on need, irrespective of race, religion, gender or political affiliation.” (MSF, n.d.)

The organisation thus has a very clear single mandate: provide emergency medical care.

Since its creation, MSF has evolved from operating in two contexts (the Biafra war in Nigeria, and Eastern Pakistani floods in 1971) to numerous contexts in more than 60 countries (Doctors Without Borders, n.d.). Its full-time staff amounts to over 30,000 people from various nationalities and its yearly income has exceeded € 900 million over the past three years, of which 90% is accounted for by private donors (MSF, 2013).

The organisational structure has a federation-style form, with 23 associations making up what is labelled ‘the MSF Movement’ (MSF, n.d.). Each association (or section), which refer to country-specific divisions of the Movement, has its own Board of Directors that is elected annually by its members. Though each association has variable autonomy on project decisions, large strategic decisions, for example the decision of complete withdrawal from Somalia earlier this year (Doucleff, 2013), are taken on a global level with all Directors of Operations from each of the 19 sections (Phellan, personal communication, on 12/08/2013). As for the structural process of exit strategy decisions, it is made clear that there was a hierarchical structure: the personnel in the field would make a recommendation on the best course of action, which would be considered by the “desk managers” (Ibid), who take the final decision regarding operational procedures. These “desk officers” are then in turn in accountable to the Director of Operations in the hierarchical structure, who review strategic decisions and set the overall strategic direction for the desks to follow. Day-to-day decisions, however, are to be taken in the field.
3.1.2. Introducing IRC

The International Rescue Committee is a humanitarian organisation concerned with the survival and resettlement of refugees. Its mandate is summarised by the following mission statement:

“The International Rescue Committee serves refugees and communities victimized by oppression or violent conflict worldwide. Founded in 1933, the IRC is committed to freedom, human dignity, and self-reliance. This commitment is expressed in emergency relief, protection of human rights, post-conflict development, resettlement assistance, and advocacy.” (InterAction, n.d.)

As mentioned in the mission statement, the IRC was founded in 1933 by no other than Albert Einstein (IRC, n.d.), and is thus a US-based organisation, with headquarters in London, Brussels and Geneva and operates in 40 different countries. Its total income has just exceeded € 250 million in the year 2011 (IRC, 2013). Though at first glance this organisation may seem to be an emergency-focused organisation, its programs also dictate to be concerned with refugee situations after the emergency is over, right until refugees can claim to be self-sufficient in their place of resettlement. They thus have programs concerning various subjects, from emergency response to post-conflict development. In the words of Gerald Martone, Director of Humanitarian Affairs at the IRC: “we found that we stay in a country 9 to 14 years once we begin a project somewhere” (G. Martone, personal communication, 12/09/2013).

Their organisational structure also takes a hierarchical form. Strategic operational decisions such as exit strategies are taken in the same manner as described by the interview participant of MSF: after a recommendation of the field, the executive level vice presidents of the headquarters to which the project responds will preside over this decision (Martone, 2013). It should be noted, however, that a “high-profile exit” (ibid), was also decided at the most senior level, as a way of political manoeuvre.

3.1.3. Introducing World Vision

World Vision is an organisation supplying “emergency assistance to children and families affected by natural disasters and civil conflict” (WorldVision, n.d.), which was initially
started as a project in the 1950s. As a faith-based organisation, its mission statement is described as follows: “Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, we serve alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God’s unconditional love for all people” (ibid). The finances of WorldVision are quite substantial; over the past three years, they have managed to raise over a billion US dollars, making it one of the world’s largest humanitarian organisations in the world. Operating in 92 countries, World Vision also delivers both disaster relief and developmental projects throughout the world.

The structural way in which exit strategy decisions are made differs somewhat from the former two organisations, because of its emphasised connectivity with local communities. Besides this, they take operational decisions on a horizontal basis – this means that operational people as well as headquarter staff are involved in the decision-making process. In other words, “it’s a group of people that we feel know the response, the situation within World Vision, the context... they come together.” (R. Cascioli, personal communication, on 30/11/2013).

3.2. Analyzing the case studies with the theoretical model

This section provides the analysis of the different case study organisations (MSF, IRC and World Vision). Starting with MSF, this section analyses each organisation through the eight different factors. This will be the basis to provide a solid illustration of the decision-making pattern of each organisation.

3.2.1. MSF: discussion of data found

To start with MSF, the context was stated to be the most determining factor for the exit strategy, according to the interview (Phellan, 2013). This has been confirmed to a certain extent by the other sources (Lucchi, 2012; Ooms & Sondorp, 2006), though it should be mentioned that the focus of the other sources was more on the elapse of projects of MSF themselves rather than the overall picture or situation, pushing the factor of the context to the back. This thus allows the traditional argument found in most humanitarian

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3 For the full interview, please refer to Appendix 1
projects to ensue: a pre-determined or planned exit strategy does not make any sense, because “it’s not how emergencies work” (ibid). Moreover, the evaluations of MSF projects done by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) have found that exit strategies in certain case studies tended to be non-existent, as it was not budgeted for (SIDA, 2004; SIDA, 2010). This runs contrary to the second factor, the project cycle, of which the same evaluative sources, as well as certain projects mentioned during the interview, stated that pre-determined or planned exit strategies would bring much more clarification, as well as sustainability to the various projects run by MSF (SIDA, 2010; Phellan, 2013; Abu-Sada, 2012). Furthermore, the lack or even absence of exit strategies even during projects was found to be harmful to the image that MSF was projecting externally, especially towards their beneficiaries. The beneficiaries especially commented on the discontinuation of aid as a direct result of ad-hoc ext strategies (Abu-Sada, 2012). This unpleasant perception from external actors (including beneficiaries) of the MSF organisation associated with a badly administered or no exit strategy at all also substantiates the assumption made in the introduction; that pre-determined or planned exit strategies are better for longer-term project impacts.

That being said, efficiency is largely the basis upon which an exit strategy is based, according to Phellan (2013). The termination of a project is largely dependent upon a scientific approach, which is called “Epicentre”; this approach consists of the gathering of epidemiological data, or take inventory of the status quo in terms of the health situation in the context they are operating, and thereafter allows MSF to make a more informed decision upon an exit strategy. This is supposedly done widespread throughout MSF, as evaluations confirm (SIDA 2004; SIDA 2010). However, Abu-Sada commented that this is not really a sustained approach (2012), as Epicentre only looks at the status quo of the context and does not focus on the long-term ramifications. It does not measure, for example, what would happen if MSF leaves the context. This has also been a strong argument in the MSF discussion paper on project handover (Ooms & Sondorp, 2006). There it was argued that by only taking into account the status quo of the context, MSF cannot facilitate handover that well because the quality of healthcare is typically not that
high, thus limiting the sustainability of the project. SIDA has also found that sustainability is not necessarily an exit criterion in one of MSF-Holland’s guidelines on exit strategies, however it can be a means to an end (SIDA, 2010). This implies an indirect disregard for longer-term project outcomes, and might be an explanatory reason for the largely ad-hoc manner of exit strategy decisions. In the interview, it was also stated that the mandate had a large influence on determining exit strategies:

“Being an emergency organisation means that we have like a narrow band [...] So, we’re a one act... one-trick pony, which makes it easy in some regards, to say okay, if it’s not a medical act, we don’t do it.” (Phellan, 2013).

This thus implies that such a view on short-term results is in large part a consequence of the "self-imposed” mandate (Phellan, 2013). This factor has also been found to be the large point of debate in a dialogue paper (Ooms & Sondorp, 2006) on project handover, as there are large questions of the interpretation of mandate, especially when it comes to the handover of projects. One side argues that handovers and exit strategies of MSF emergency projects should be more integrated with transitions to development stages, as the real-time conditions in certain developmental contexts, especially in terms of healthcare, do not differ as much from those in emergency situations (ibid).

The project cycle has also been identified to be a contributing factor on the exit strategy in the interview; it was made clear that this is usually reviewed on a yearly basis, however this time period can be shortened or extended by the context (Phellan, 2013). The project cycle has also been indicated to be very important for emergency relief projects. However, the project cycle seems to be at the background of the discussion in other documents, implying a focus elsewhere. The assessments of the evaluations were more on the exit strategy options, and its effects rather than on the project cycle (SIDA, 2004; SIDA 2010).

Others, such as the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) have noted the importance of organisational capacity in executing the project cycle. In an internal document where ALNAP presented the options for exit, Mental Health projects of MSF were analysed in terms of organisational capacity and strategy,
making organisational capacity and coordination the focus factor in that paper (ALNAP, n.d.). The recommended options were thus based on internal considerations and the organisational direction, putting the exit strategy considerations in an entirely different light. In this sense, the context had very little to do with the display of exit strategy options. Yet this paper did not make it clear if these Mental Health projects were to be operated in emergency situations or meant for additional support to already existing emergency projects, making it difficult to take this account into consideration when discussing exit strategies in emergency settings. However the document does highlight the issues associated with organisational capacity, and demonstrates that there is consideration for this factor.

Moreover, Abu-Sada (2012) also noted that problems with exit strategies primarily stemmed from internal mechanisms, such as lack of coordination and communication amongst field and headquarters staff, which in turn was harmful for the image MSF is portraying, as previously stated. Furthermore, the line of decision-making, though made to be as effective as possible, can be confusing for large exit strategies because of the confederate structure that MSF has; with 19 different sections that each have three or more hierarchical levels, decisions taken at the top might differ in opinion from those of the field staff. This follows onto two other factors described in the list that determine exit strategies. In terms of communication, the times that it became a contributing factor in the discussion above is when the exit strategy is a potential handover, or when there are actors detrimental to the project that MSF has set up. When other actors are involved in the handover of a project, the interviewee did clearly state that an exit strategy becomes simpler to plan and execute (Phellan, 2013), as there is substantial ‘follow-up’ in the project.

However the decision to handover projects to other organisations, especially different Ministries of Health (MoH), has also been a controversial decision, as there is always a risk of quality reduction in the delivery of aid, as Egbert (2006) states. Phellan (2013) gave the example of the reduction and handover of malnutrition programs in Niger, as malnutrition was in decline because of these programs. Certain field staff saw the
handover of these programs to the MoH in Niger resulting in the demise of quality and reach of these programs, and thus subsequently left the MSF organisation to set up a different malnutrition program in that same country.

This example not only illustrates the difficulty of having to deal with external actors but also another factor, the human factor. This factor is more of an underlying factor, which gets repeated across the data. Phellan (2013) very clearly recognises that “We’re a human organisation. We make decisions, we sometimes fail, we sometimes don’t agree the decision we made last week, so that... that’s what happens.” The effects of this factor are most commonly seen through internal communication and coordination across the organisation; indeed, the friction between field and headquarters staff described above by Abu-Sada can also be the result of the degree of knowledge and skills of certain staff, for example (2006: 56).

The two last factors, visibility and funding & resources, are by no means the least important. On the contrary, Lucchi describes the approach of MSF towards their projects as “cost/resource-heavy” (2012: 100), impacting heavily upon the way they approach their exit strategies in urban settings, which could be more orientated towards longer-term development and capacity building. As seen in the literature review, a mainstream critique in the formulation or decision of exit strategies is precisely the issue of dependency upon funding, which also happens to be the case in some of the programs of MSF (ibid). The subject of funding and resources was also something pronounced on several occasions in the interview: “Funding is always going to be a question, because if you have less funding available [...] that’s obviously going to limit your ambitions.”

The SIDA evaluations both mentioned the factor of funding and resources as a very large influence upon the exit strategy, with one mentioning a case where an exit strategy had to be put in place because resources kept being looted from the hospital MSF had set up, and the other describing the funding solution MSF-Switzerland found for an emergency hospital they were operating for almost 10 years with emergency funding (SIDA 2004, 2010). As for visibility, Phellan (2013) also made a direct link between funding and media, as MSF does not directly accept government funding. Therefore MSF makes use of the
media as part of a strategy to generate this funding. However he maintained that “the media does not impact our decisions”, thus showing a limiting impact of this factor.

### 3.2.2. Setting the discussion on MSF straight

By approaching the data analysis through the different factors, this discussion above highlights exactly all the issues brought up in the guidelines analysed in the theoretical framework (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005; Global Protection Cluster, 2012; IASC, 1997; WFP, 2005). Yet, the discussion primarily focuses on certain aspects of the different factors, rather than the four different natures of influence in organisational decision-making.

It is evident from the data that the context is indeed the primary factor affecting an exit strategy. The SIDA evaluation of three different case studies (2004) found this to be the case, as did Phellan (2013), who stated it was the primary factor affecting an exit strategy. Hence it becomes very difficult to determine the impact of the other natures discussed. Each is largely affected by contextual factors and not only situational but also external actors make up a large part of this context. This will ultimately affect all three other natures of decision-making. This is an example of how the respective motivational natures are intertwined and make the distinction of theory in practice very complex. It is evident that the focus of much of the exit strategies is placed upon efficiency-based factors, such as project outcomes as well as organisational capacity. With the example of Epicentre, it is also evident that this efficiency is very much short-term focused. This points directly to the suspicions made in the introduction; exit strategy decisions are still made on an ad-hoc basis.

Running contrary to this longer-term approach is the mandate of MSF; the mandate directly impacts the longer-term approach, thus limiting the speed of this shift of line of thinking. Because the mandate is very limited in its nature, so are the projects and conditions in which MSF operates. In this sense, the value-based factor is clearly evident; operating within the mandate and mission of MSF is a factor also strictly adhered to. This, however, goes conveniently hand in hand with the third basis of decision-making, as
short-term, quick impact projects always manage to acquire more funding due to their short-term, finite nature (Heyse, 2013), thus indicating a clear area of overlap between the value-based and economy-based factors. Furthermore, more overlap can be discovered when considering efficiency- and economy-based factors. Indeed, as Phellan (2013) indicated, much of the reporting and media done is to show in general what outcomes their projects have had.

In summary, the contextual factors are therefore the most dominating in this decision-making pattern, followed by the economy and efficiency-based factors. The value-based factor also has a role, which overlaps largely with the economy-based factor, yet is the least influencing. With this analysis, the following representation of decision-making can be constructed:

![Figure 6: Decision-making pattern of MSF](image)

This model, which is perceived to be the current representation of how MSF as an organisation decides on their exit strategies, shall be instrumental in the comparison of exit strategy decisions in between the other organisations.

3.2.3. IRC: Discussion of data found

The concrete data on exit strategies of IRC projects found has not been as substantial as that of MSF. It should be noted, however, that the nature of the IRC has a lot to do with this, as this organisation does not close down or start up emergency relief projects as
frequently as the previous organisation does. This means that evaluations on exit strategies are probably less in numbers. In fact, one of the first things stated in the interview was:

“A lot of countries we exit are not because they no longer need our services, so it’s not a needs-based choice. You know, it’s not ‘ow, they’ve graduated from humanitarian assistance’, it’s often sadly more pragmatic.” (Martone, 2013)

This means that exit strategies are only implemented when necessary; in other words, exit strategies are not originally counted on, as projects are started with the intention of having a longer timescale. This is echoed in the internal document (Martone, 2001); exit criteria consist largely of contextual factors, such as the political situation, that make operations unmanageable or unsuccessful. More specifically, the internal document gives certain conditions in order to administer an exit strategy. Firstly, there must be (local) acceptance by the beneficiaries of the services that the IRC is offering. Secondly, the services and aid that the IRC is offering should not be duplicated – this means that the assumption of responsibility of these services should not be taken on by the government in question or any other aid organisation. Thirdly, the services delivered should not be corrupted or diverted in any shape form or way from the intended beneficiaries. Lastly, the security environment must be one that guarantees the operational and personal safety of the staff and material and financial assets of the IRC (Martone, 2001). All these conditions are contextual; efficiency-, or value-based factors are not mentioned at all. In this manner, the project cycle is only a large factor of the decision for an exit strategy in a negative sense, as it only becomes important when the project fails to meet the expected target outcomes due to unexpected circumstances. Moreover, the notion of pre-determined or institutional guidance was not used at all, according to Martone (2013). The duration of some of the projects can be seen as a reason; a project typically lasts 9 to 14 years, anecdotal analysis found (ibid).

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4 For the full interview, please refer to Appendix 2
However, it does seem to occur that better circumstances permit an exit strategy, as it did in Guinea where phase out began after fewer than 10,000 refugees remained in the country (IRC, 2009). Furthermore, from the evaluation (Xefina Consulting, 2007) as well as the project report (IRC, 2009) it was clear that the exit strategy discussed in the project report was clearly planned and aimed at the sustainability of the project after the project period (Xefina Consulting, 2007; IRC 2012), thus indicating that the exit strategy is considered and planned for in some of their project cycle.

The most important factor identified for the decision to exit by Gerald Martone (2013) during the interview was funding or resources. More concretely, the pragmatic view he took on was better formulated as “funding has dried out” (ibid: 1). This stresses a large degree of importance of this factor for the IRC.

Another important factor found whilst searching for discussions on exit strategies of the IRC, was external communication. Many project reports were found to be in conjunction with many other partners, the most common being the United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHRC) (see, for example, the SURGE projects), thus indicating that the decision for an exit strategy is not that often taken solely by the IRC itself. Furthermore, the two project discussions (Xefina Consulting, 2007; IRC, 2009) as well as the interviewee stated the participation of external actor(s) or partner(s) in the transition or exit strategy. This makes external communication also a large factor. More specifically, when asked about the type of partners involved in transitions or handover, Martone (2013) stated that the IRC’s organisational strategy is focused on shifting partnerships from international to local or national organisations in the countries they operate in (ibid). The report on a health project in South Sudan confirms this approach, as does the evaluative report, where in both instances the building up of local capacities was pivotal in the exit strategy (Xefina Consulting, 2007; IRC, 2012). Furthermore, the internal guidance document on entry and exit criteria also encourages local or beneficiary participation, thus echoing this important factor.

Additionally, there is the negative connotation of external communication; as already stated by the internal guidance document written in 2001, actors endangering the
delivery of services to the intended beneficiaries, as well as actors jeopardising personal safety of IRC staff can also be conditions under which an exit strategy should be administered. The interview strengthened this point:

“When aid agencies lose control over the targeting and distribution of aid they’ll withdraw. [...] So in those cases organisations will withdraw. [...] So someone else just makes the decisions over goods, that’s a deal breaker” (Martone, 2013)

This means that external actors that affect the project negatively have a large influence on the exit strategy. Furthermore, when asked about the internal organisational decision-making process, he added that every organisation in their structure has their own exit strategy, except if “it’s a political manoeuvre, to show a high profile exit. It’s a way to shame a government.” (ibid). This means that the internal dynamics of reaching the exit strategy decision might be different in different parts of their organisation, however the more significant the exit as a political statement, the more unified the decision may be.

When considering the factor of internal communication and capacity, little was mentioned except for the absence of organisational capacity in the exit criteria in the internal document (Martone, 2001). The same can be said about the human factor, as the brief discussion about the individuals taking the decision was taken in terms of the positions of those directing that decision in the interview (Martone, 2013). The human factor was also discussed in a PSEA project evaluation, yet this was also discussed in a negative way; it was thus noted that a lack of interest and individual assumption of responsibility directly impacted on its sustainability (Xefina Consulting, 2007), however this was again tied to the position individuals were in. Therefore, the organisational aspect or factor seemed to be the prevailing of the two. This highlights the underlying importance of organisational structure in the exit strategy.

The visibility factor is also discussed; Martone (2013) did state the obvious connection between visibility and funding, which in turn affected the decision for an exit strategy. As already stated in the interview, the funding and resources are the biggest influence on the exit strategy, hence the visibility factor will have an indirect effect. This confirms the link
made earlier in the theory in between visibility and funding, thus showing an underlying effect of this factor.

The last factor of influence, the mandate or mission, seems to have minimal influence on the exit strategy. Though the mandate of the IRC has a focus on a type of people, namely IDPs and refugees, the type of projects and programs instigated are numerous in subjects, therefore exit strategies also differ greatly. The interview did not discuss this factor, as did the exit criteria in the internal document. This could point to a diminishing importance of influence. In that document, the functional aspect behind the fulfilment of the mission of the IRC were discussed, however there was no discussion to be found about the delineation of the mandate, which is one of the explanation for the diversity of projects (Martone, 2001). The subjects of the project evaluation and report varied widely, as do the other programs and projects of the IRC. This implies that the breadth of the mandate somehow allows such a variety of programs. When looking at the theoretical assumption made in the Introduction, the IRC thus follows suit with this assumption; the larger the mandate, the more variety of projects and the less delineation on the exit strategy.

3.2.4. Discussing the influencing factors in the IRC analysis

From the analysis made above, it is obvious that the mandate or mission of the IRC has minimal influence on their exit strategies, as not a lot of evidence was found on this. A consequence of this is that less emphasis is therefore placed on the imagery and purpose of their projects, yet more on the functional and operational aspects. This can be confirmed by the fact that contextual influences, such as the negative actions of external actors that directly impact the emergency relief projects, on the project cycle are seen as the factor that should determine an exit strategy. Furthermore, this more ‘pragmatic’ approach towards operational decisions such as exit strategies also enlarges the connection with the resource/funding factor of the decision-making. This was clearly stated by Gerald Martone (2013), and implied in the project report.
Therefore, the decision-making nature is mostly geared towards having the most efficient and cost-effective outcome in the exit strategy. This efficiency is however also being more perceived in the longer-term, as sustainability and external actors are also considerably taken into considerations, which has been shown in the projects evaluation and report to be planned and anticipated for. Particularly, a shift can be observed in the external communication factor; as already mentioned, many projects have shifted over the past years from involving large international NGOs such as UNHCR to partnerships with smaller, more local national NGOs in various countries. This approach has also been declared to be the future organisational direction in the interview (Martone, 2013).

In summary, the largest motivational nature is economy-based, followed by the efficiency and context factors. The influence of the value-based factor remains minimal. Based on this summary, the following model has been constructed:

![Decision-making pattern of IRC](image)

As can already be seen, large differences can be detected. In the cross-comparison this shall be further discussed.

3.2.5. World Vision: Discussion of data found

Through a thorough overview, it becomes clear that World Vision has more publically available documents concerning the planning and guidelines on how to correctly set up an exit strategy. Thus, when examining the project cycle factor, it is apparent, with the
existing guidelines and tools available, that more thought has gone into having a pre-
determined approach towards exit strategies, for example with the “Guidelines for transition” in the Disaster Management Standards (World Vision, 2011: 69). When asked why this topic was discussed and to be put into further guidelines, Cascioli (2013) responded:

“Well the main reason was we didn’t want to lose what we learnt in the tsunami. So what I sent you, is really what we’ve been learning through the tsunami. [...] But I cannot say that what I’ve sent you is used all the time, because its not integrated into our disaster management standards. So those who use it are those who know it.”

This indicates that, although guidelines and lessons learnt documents are in the pipeline, these are not frequently used (yet). This is confirmed by the mid term evaluation report (World Vision, 2003), where it was stated that the exit strategy was “very poor in all countries due to the mode of operation of WFP” and “communities were not assisted to plan their own strategies outside their dependence on food aid” (p. 6). By having a partnership in this project with WFP, the planning of an exit strategy did not take place. This implies a distortion between the theory and the practice; though sustainability is clearly on the Learning and Evaluation agenda, this has not been done in practice.

Considering this aspect on exit strategies, Symes (2012) also noted that focus needs to be put towards the sustainability of the project impact, rather than immediate project results, as this is considered a key feature in community resilience. A Transition Checklist made up to facilitate project managers with the project exit or handover also confirms this approach, with the first part of the checklist being about sustainability factors, rather than the mechanical aspects. Adding onto the sustainability approach, partnership was mentioned to be an important factor in this matter. More concretely:

“By placing partnering at the core of its development approach, World Vision is able to play contextually appropriate roles of facilitator, broker or intermediary, technical supporter and even

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5 For the full interview, please refer to Appendix 3
service deliverer where necessary, but without taking over the legitimate roles of other structures which are vital for future sustainability.” (Symes, 2012 p.2)

Therefore, external coordination and communication is an extremely important factor. Cascioli (2013) confirmed this, stating that the links established between the organisation and the affected communities are very important in determining the approach of an exit strategy. For example, many emergency response projects are later on integrated or handed over to National Offices of World Vision, if they have what Cascioli calls a “long-term presence”. She also added that, with an established “level of trust” between the partnerships, it increases the effectiveness of the handover. This ‘level of trust’ can be interpreted as a type of willingness in cooperation; Cascioli (2013) mentioned that a review carried out in the Middle East revealed a better established level of trust with World Vision because of the fact that they are a faith-based organisation.

This leads to the mission or mandate factor. Although not much was mentioned about this in the different guidelines or the evaluation report, Cascioli (2013) did briefly respond to this factor, making it clear that the mandate of the organisation is formulated in such a way that it does not force an emergency response project to a point of exit, thus decreasing the importance of this factor. The rationale behind this is that the organisation stays for “as long as there is the humanitarian needs are there” (ibid). Adding onto this is the fact that World Vision has various projects and missions in both relief and development circumstances, which makes handover or transition, rather than phase out or a clear exit, more used options for exit strategies.

On the other hand, the most important factor as identified by Cascioli was the funding and resources factor. She specifically referred to the influence of the different types of funding that would make an impact on an exit strategy, saying that grant-funded projects, especially in countries where World Vision has not had that many previous relations or an established office, will make an exit strategy more difficult (ibid). Furthermore, she added that an exit strategy plan should be budgeted for to get a better working exit strategy.
The second most important factor she stated to be, was the willingness of the staff leading the response to plan and execute an exit strategy, thus indicating the importance of the human factor. This is not stated in any of the other documents, however logical in the sense that guidelines are for those who already have a motivation to work on an exit strategy. However the human factor can be seen as an underlying issue in the draft paper on sustainability. There, the fact that less than 10% of cases addressed the issue of sustainability in programming in World Vision Australia shows a clear lack of attention in this issue, thus illustrating the importance of individual motivation (Symes, 2012). Additionally, when considering the structure of the organisation in terms of decision-making, Cascioli stated that the decentralised structure of the decision-making process was more aimed at having “the best understanding of what needs to happen”, yet it was “not like decisions are taken at... in one spot, by one person”. Operational decisions such as exit strategies are therefore not taken hierarchically, or in one place, yet taken on a horizontal level.

This leads to a consideration of the factor of internal organisational capacity and coordination, which is also important, however assumed to have an underlying subsistence. By stating a factual reliance on country offices in case of a handover or transition, the internal capacity of the organisation is relied upon (Cascioli, 2013). This is therefore also an important aspect considering the exit strategy yet similar with the approach towards the external communication and coordination factor. Both are considered to be pivotal in the determination of which exit strategy to use.

The last two factors, the context and visibility, were less frequently mentioned by all documents. Though Cascioli (2013) directly linked visibility to funding, any further comments or remarks were not made. Neither the guidelines, draft paper, nor the mid-term evaluation linked visibility directly to the exit strategy, thus making it an underlying factor, yet not a determining one.

The overall context, though underlying, was stated to have a more important role in determining an exit strategy, though it was again directly linked to funding. Moreover, the context was important for the project cycle as seen in one of the guidelines (World
Vision, 2012). Thus, though important for the project, this factor has not been regarded as crucial for determining an exit strategy.

3.2.6. Discussing the influencing factors in the case of World Vision

From the discussion above, it becomes apparent that the most dominant basis for the decision-making on exit strategies is based on efficiency; the focus on planning, as well as attention to sustainability of projects clearly points towards this direction. Furthermore, the calculated approach displayed when considering the external communication and coordination factor also points that this factor is more regarded as an efficiency factor, rather than a contextual or circumstantial issue to deal with.

Thereafter, equally important is the economy factor, which is partly tied in with efficiency. The specific distinction of types of funding, points toward a more conscious, calculated move towards exit strategy decisions. Together with the determined answer from the interview with Cascioli makes this an equally important factor.

This leaves the value-based decision ground behind; neither the interview nor any of the documents specifically stated any specific references to them. This is followed by an increasing importance of contextual influences, which, though important, appear to be not detrimental towards decisions taken with regards to the exit strategy. Specific to contextual influences is that it is not necessarily the context itself that has an impact; it is more about the personal effort of the individuals involved in taking the decision of an exit strategy.

In summary, the efficiency and economy-based factors are the biggest influences on the exit strategy. This is closely intertwined with contextual factors, which are also instrumental in determining the manner of exit. The value-based factor again has the minimal influence. With the analysis made above, the following illustration can thus be constructed:
3.3. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the different factors involved in an exit strategy for each individual organisation. Based on the analysis of each individual factor in each organisation, an illustration of the organisational decision-making patterns has been made. The first case study organisation, MSF, has as largest contributing nature the context, which is followed by the economy- and efficiency-based motivations. The value-based factor, which has a certain role, is the smallest influencing factor.

IRC, the second case study organisation, has as its largest determining motivation the economic nature. This is followed by the efficiency-based nature and the context. A minimal influence is allocated to the nature of value.

The last case study organisation, World Vision, had equalling influences of efficiency and economy-based factors, followed by contextual factors. Again, the value-based factor had a minimal influence in the exit strategy decision.

To summarise, the following three illustrations of decision-making patterns have been constructed:
Though not equal in comparison, there is a lot of underlying equal ground to find in between the three different organisations. Firstly, the economic nature is of equal in all three organisations, thus providing at least some overlap. Secondly, both IRC and World Vision have the same interpretation of the value-based natures. Besides equalities, there are also disparities between the three different organisations. The most noticeable observation, however, is that MSF has a more differing decision-making pattern.
compared to the other two. These observations will be instrumental for the data comparison and discussion that follows.
4. DATA COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Comparing the models and factors

This chapter provides for a comparative analysis of the research findings, starting with a discussion on the four different natures, which will bring a more detailed discussion about the specific factors that influence exit strategy decision-making. Thereafter, the different overall models of the organisational decision-making patterns are compared, which are then used in a wider discussion that includes the application of the theoretical models and questions raised in the introduction and first chapters. The conclusion postulates the main points of the comparison and summarises wider discussion. The questions answered in this chapter are the following:

- Is there a comparative pattern to be discovered in between the three different decision-making patterns?
- Why is this (not) the case?

The main finding in this section is that, though commonalities in different factors can be found, there is no comparative pattern with regards to the decision-making of exit strategies in between these three different humanitarian organisations. This chapter also confirms the argument made in the beginning that humanitarian organisations still make large use of improvised exit strategies, which is largely tied to the short-term nature of the mandate. This illustrates a confirmation of James March’s theory on the prioritisation of decision-making.

4.1.1. The contextual influences

The contextual factors, such as external communication and the context differ significantly in impact for the three different organisations. The first organisation analysed, MSF, had a clear contextual influence on its decision-making in exit strategies. Though other contextual factors were of more influence in their decision-making, the
emphasis on the context as a determining factor was absent in the other two organisations. Other contextual factors such as external coordination and communication were then in turn regarded higher in impact in decision-making in the latter two organisations than in the first.

On the topic of external communication, it was found that the IRC and World Vision had a more participatory approach towards their exit strategies than MSF. The remarkable explanation found in Ooms & Sondorp (2006) was that handover of the emergency medical care projects that MSF provides would mean a diminishing of the quality of medical care provided and therefore this manner of exit is often not opted for. Yet it should also be noted that handover as an exit strategy is never done, depending on the type of medical care and types of partners available. In contrast to this, World Vision has showed a preference towards the handover of their emergency relief projects to local partners. Part of the reason for this is because the World Vision organisation already has the local partners that can guarantee the organisational capacity to take over through their network of faith-based partners. This is in addition to the country offices they have established in many countries where they have ongoing development projects.

The IRC has also been found to have more partnerships with external actors, however tend to partner with large international humanitarian agencies such as UNICEF, Save The Children and UNHCR. Yet Martone (2013) did stress that local partners would be the way forward for the organisation to ensure a more sustainable, participatory approach towards exit strategies.

This could indicate a similarity in contextual influences in between the IRC and World Vision, however when considering the last contextual factor, the human factor, there is a clear disparity between the findings in the IRC and World Vision analysis. Whilst the human factor was found to be negatively attributed to people in certain positions in the IRC, World Vision expressed a positive attitude towards the human factor that could then have a bigger impact in the decision-making on their exit strategies.
Furthermore, when taking into account the decision-making procedure in the organisation, the human factor was mentioned specifically to be important at least in certain cases with MSF. Phellan (2013) gave a concrete example of the influence of this factor on the decision-making in a project conducted in South Sudan, where the options presented to the person in charge of taking the exit strategy disregarded certain contextual factors and over-emphasised others, resulting into a decision with which certain field staff did not agree. Though this type of situation was also hinted towards in an evaluation report of the IRC (Xefina Consulting, 2007), this was not confirmed in the interview or by any other sources consulted. However the human factor is getting a growing recognition of importance, which is confirmed by all three case studies. Though in a different light in World Vision, the emphasis on the positive attitude of the individuals to implement a proper exit strategy, stressed by Cascioli (2013), also directly confirms the underlying importance. This, in turn, has a wider implication on the theoretical approach to organisational decision-making explained in the third chapter. This shall be a point that recurs later on in the discussion.

4.1.2. The efficiency influence

The efficiency factors implicate a larger debate because there are larger disparities to be discovered. Firstly, all organisations approach the project cycle factor in a different manner. For example, the project cycle factor is pivotal in MSF’s decision-making, yet in a contextual way. Target outcomes are calculated and determined according to the needs in the context. This implies a bias towards a results-based approach by MSF, which determines their point of exit on immediate data gathered in the immediate context where the relief project takes place. Thus, typically, when desired targets and timeframes are reached, an exit strategy is implemented. This is the opposite case with the IRC, where the project cycle outcomes are also important for the exit strategy decision, yet only when these are not being met. At World Vision, the emphasis lies more on the planning of the project cycle, rather than the project cycle itself. The three different organisations therefore have three entirely different ways of interpreting the influence of the project cycle factor. However, its importance does remain pivotal in all three cases in
terms of the decision-making in exit strategies. The interesting question discussed later on is whether this is due to the interpretation of the mandate of the organisation. Another interesting issue regarding the project cycle factor in general is the view on sustainability, which is also discussed in the second part of this chapter.

The internal coordination and capacity factor is more of a sub-set of the efficiency factor. In both the cases of MSF and IRC, organisational coordination and capacity were highlighted only when there was a lack of it, thus giving it a negative connotation to its influence. At World Vision, organisational coordination and capacity was directly linked to external coordination and communication, which was also regarded as a highly influential factor. Further to this, the communication and decision-making structures were different in World Vision then from the other two. Whilst exit strategy decisions at MSF and the IRC are both taken in a hierarchical way, World Vision has a more decentralised approach, where the different stakeholders that hold a strategic importance will be physically involved in the decision-making, thus indicating a clear overlap.

4.1.3. The economic influence

The economic factors did have more of a correlation in between the three different organisations. Firstly, the visibility factor was recognised by all three to be greatly contributing towards the finances of relief projects. This also makes a first correlating factor in between all three organisations. The importance of this factor towards the final decision-making in exit strategies, however, was minimal, also in all three organisations.

Nevertheless, totally discrediting this factor is also not realistic. As already mentioned, its direct correlation between fundraising and project budgets, also gives it a great underlying importance. This is precisely because all three cases confirmed the crucial importance of the budget and resources factor – all three cases confirmed that funding will always seriously affect the exit strategy, not only the decision of when to exit, but also the manner of exit. This was specifically confirmed by Cascioli (2013), who stated directly that an exit strategy could only be properly implemented if there is budget foreseen for it. Other evaluation papers on MSF (SIDA, 2004; SIDA 2010) also declared
that lack of funding had a large implication on the exit strategy, as well as the overall sustainability of the project. Martone (2013) also confirmed funding, or the lack of it, to be the biggest influencing factor for relief projects of the IRC. What is more distinctive is the differentiation of the type of funding received, which could influence greatly the manner of exit. This was expressed by Cascioli (2013) for World Vision and also to a lesser extent by Phellan (2013).

4.1.4. The value-based influence

The value-based influenced factor – the mandate or mission factor – did not have a large importance. More precisely, the mandate or mission factor has been surprisingly minimal in the two organisations that have both relief and development programs. In the case of the single-mandated organisation, MSF, it was stated that it did influence the exit strategy, because of the nature of its projects. This in turn also had an effect on funding and the project cycle, as a limited mandate also requires limited funding. Yet this was also said to be the case with World Vision, which receives funding from many religious institutions precisely because of its reputation as a faith-based organisation. However Cascioli (2013) did also clearly state that this does not hinder or interfere in their operational decisions, including exit strategies.

On the other hand, it was also made clear that the mission or vision factor did make the option for handover easier, as options to handover to local religious institutions made it easier to facilitate handover. This is not the case for the other two organisations, indicating a certain overall importance of the mandate or mission factor, yet this seemed to be the most minimal factor in the case of the IRC. This also lays an interesting ground for the discussion that will follow.

4.1.5. The bigger picture

When comparing the three decision-making patterns at a holistic level, it becomes clear that there is no distinctive pattern to be discovered in between them. It is apparent, however, that all three organisations put an underlying emphasis on the same influences, but in a different way. The economic influence, for example, is comparably equal in all
three organisations, and similar statements and situations have been determined concerning this influence for the exit strategies of each organisation.

On the other hand, completely different perceptions of the efficiency-influenced factors have also been ascertained. This implies that each organisation has a distinctive approach in their decision-making, when it comes to the project cycle and internal coordination and communication factors.

An illustration of such different perceptions of efficiency can be found with the planning of exit strategies. The notion of pre-determined or planned exit strategies was only ascertained in one of the three organisations. At MSF, for example, this was not a practicable option for implementing an exit strategy, as the emphasis was put on a result-based examination of the context in which the relief project found itself. For the IRC, planned exit strategies are also not practical because of the typical long duration of their emergency relief projects.

It was only found at World Vision that the concept of pre-determined or planned exit strategies had been explored. The fact that there were documents found on the execution of an exit strategy like the transition checklist, is a clear sign that World Vision sees this as an efficient measure to take into account when determining an exit strategy. However it should be noted that it was also found that the other two organisations did have this issue ‘on the radar’. More recent documentation of MSF on exit strategies hinted heavily towards a review of their current approach (Lucchi, 2012), and in the interview Gerald Martone (2013) hinted that a move towards a more participatory approach in their relief projects with local partners was the considered method forward, especially with planned exit strategies.

4.1.6. Discussion: back to James March

After analysing the decision-making patterns on a holistic level, it becomes clear that there is no clear pattern in the decision-making to be found in any of the case studies. However, deeper analysis, use of the theories discussed in the previous chapters can
ascertain certain trends about issues raised in the Introduction and Theoretical Framework.

As a starting point the mandate or mission factor is a first interesting point. As all three organisations had different mandates, it all impacted the decision-making on exit strategy. Yet, MSF, the organisation that has the most straightforward, most narrow mandate, has also been found to have the largest impact of the mandate or mission factor, thus indicating a large delineation of the mandate or mission of the organisation. What is more is that World Vision, which also has relief and development programs, was found to have its faith-based nature as a positive influence towards other factors. The fact that the IRC also held a minimal regard towards the mission or mandate factor, indicates that the mandate or mission of an organisation has a more impacting influence in its operational decisions then what is found in the individual case studies.

Another reflection of this impacting influence of the mandate or mission can be found when discussing the subject of sustainability in exit strategies. Whilst the more ‘traditional’ argument for a short-term view on exit strategies was found to be upheld at MSF, this argument was less pronounced by the other two organisations. On the contrary, both organisations stress an approach more focused on the sustainability of the impact of the project. This is reflected on the ‘how’ of the exit strategy; especially World Vision has been found to be more prone towards handing over to local partners, and the IRC interview also stated to take this direction, in order to ensure sustainability of the impact of their relief projects. It should be noted, however, that the data analysis of MSF found that this is also a question posed frequently internally as well, thus signalling a change of vision, yet this was not seen in the current approach.

This analysis of the issue of sustainability implies that the impact of the mandate on its operational procedures does indeed exist, which in turn confirms the theoretical approach designed by James March explained in the first chapter. The strategic decision of the vision or the mission does indeed have an influence on the operational decision of an organisation, however this influence can only be seen at a holistic level, as two of the
three case studies showed to have a minimal value-based influence in their decision-making, precisely because the mandate was more broad.

4.1.7. The influence of structure

As already described, another component of this research is to examine the impact of organisational structure on their decision-making. Here it was found that the structure did not have much impact on the decision-making itself. The decision-making structure was found to be different in one of the three organisations examined; however none attributed a greater impact in the effectiveness of decision-making.

Yet corresponding to the decision-making structure is the human factor. In two of the three organisations there is a large attribution of impact of the views of the individual or collective group of individuals taking the decision for an exit strategy. As already established, a direct link is to be found with this human factor and the decision-making structure of the organisations. On the other hand the impact of the structure itself still appears to remain minimal; unless the human factor affected the structure negatively, it was not regarded as an impacting issue in the decision-making. This creates uncertainty in the assumption earlier made in the theoretical chapters. There it was assumed that the organisational structure would shift the bases upon which decisions are made.

On the other side, it would also be incorrect to discredit this assumption altogether. This is because the research only looks at the current decision-making patterns in organisations, not on the individual structural evolvement throughout the years of the organisational existence. This means that the structural evolution of the organisations has not been observed, and thus changes or shifts in the decision-making patterns could not be recorded.

Therefore this assumption can neither be confirmed nor dismissed. It can be confirmed, however, that the individuals responsible for taking the decision have a much larger impact than previously noted. The decision-making structure then becomes important as a consequence of this factor or impact. This is more apparent in organisations that are hierarchical structured, as was found in the IRC and MSF. In both case studies it was found
that deficient decisions taken on exit strategies were a direct result of the individual who was in charge’s misjudgement or misconception of taking the decision. In this sense, organisational structure is only an attributing factor when it is impacted negatively by the human factor.

4.2. Conclusion

In this chapter, the results from the data analysis are compared and discussed. From this discussion, it is concluded that there is no distinctive pattern to be found in the decision-making patterns of the three selected organisations. Though certain influences had more similar outcomes, the overall results indicate no real similar results.

Yet the use of theories discussed in the first chapter has enabled an explanation of why this is the case; the underlying influence of the mandate prevails and can delineate or encourage the exit strategy decision. Furthermore, according to the theories of James March (1994), it has been argued that the three different organisations have such different decision-making approaches precisely because they have such differing overall missions and mandates. This confirms partly the assumption made in the Introduction; that the exit strategy is still largely made on an ad-hoc basis, precisely because of the limits of the mandate that humanitarian organisations have.

Moreover, the discussion has found that the influence of organisational structure in the decision-making patterns has had a smaller impact than assumed. This is because of the human factor. The personal thoughts and rationale of the individuals in positions where decisions take place prevail over the structure itself. This indicates that organisational structure has an underlying contribution to the decision-making pattern in humanitarian organisations. However it should be noted that deeper analysis of organisational structure is needed to confirm this argumentation as the focus of this research was not specifically on this subject.

Finally, other issues hinted towards in the introduction such as the sustainability of project impact have also been discussed in relation to the decision-making patterns. There it was found that sustainability is still not at the forefront of humanitarian relief
projects, though is a more prevalent and frequent subject of discussion. Relating to this subject is the concept of pre-determined or planned exit strategies. Opinions varied extensively on this notion, yet it was found in the literature review, as well as the analysis of evaluation documents on exit strategies of the different organisations that ad-hoc exit strategies usually have a more negative connotation, as the long-term project impacts diminished significantly. More specifically, improvised exit strategies turned out not to be as well executed as planned exit strategies in certain cases, as they were not planned or budgeted for.
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. A comprehensive review of the research presented

The research question posed at the beginning of this research paper is stated as follows: How do humanitarian organisations decide when to leave or hand over their emergency relief projects, especially in the context of the shifting in the overall humanitarian approach?

The purpose of this research is thus to find out how humanitarian organisations make the decision on an operational decision such as the exit strategy of a humanitarian relief project. With this comes the assumption that ad-hoc exit strategies are still favoured over pre-determined or planned exit strategies. This is assumed to be based on the limits of the mandate of a humanitarian organisation, which is limiting because of its focus on short-term relief.

5.1.1. Organisational decision-making and exit strategies

This paper first started off with a literature analysis of organisational decision-making, in order to get a clearer insight in the theoretical side of the subject. In a sea of literature, it quickly became evident that there is no ‘one right way’ of analysing this subject. Finally, the theories of James March & Herbert Simon (1958) were discovered and determined to be a starting point to the theoretical framework. The idea that organisations are made up of decisions, some with a higher degree of influence then others, is an hypothesis that this study has confirmed. In addition to this prioritisation of decisions, it was proposed that organisational structure would play a key role in determining what would be prioritised.

Thereafter, theories of International Relations, namely Rationalism, Social Constructivism and Marxism, were drawn upon to categorise the basis upon which
decisions might be prioritised. With the use of these theories, the motivational bases of decisions were explained. Three main motivational bases were determined:

1. Efficiency-based
2. Value-based
3. Economy-based

Thus a mixture of theories formed a logical model or basis in which the data could be analysed. By taking theories in corporate organisational decision-making, and merging them with the basis of the main International Relations theories, the model designed is a unique means of analysis, especially in humanitarian academic literature. However, by taking and merging these two different areas of theory, this research also recognises on the one hand that humanitarian organisations do not fit in with the typical mode of corporate decision-making, but on the other hand do function and base their organisational structure upon these types of organisations.

5.1.2. Turning to exit strategies

The subject of exit strategies to test this model on is a perfect area of research to base this research on, as this theme is an operational decision of crucial importance, yet currently undervalued in the humanitarian literature available. Many large humanitarian organisations are ambiguous on how this is decided, or even worse; appear not to be concerned with this stage of a project at all (see UN Cluster evaluations, ALNAP project evaluations for example). The argument of “it’s just not how emergencies work” (Phellan, 2013) is strictly maintained in the humanitarian sector, and most commonly used as an explanation for not having an exit strategy in the first place.

However, the subject area has been maintained precisely because of its complexity; by involving many factors of different natures, it is the perfect focus for analysis. Yet by maintaining this theme in Humanitarian Action, data and literature gathering became substantially more difficult, thus risking reducing the quality of this research, which is in certain ways reflected by the amount of material found for analysis. The conducting of
interviews and the selection of case studies has partially solved this problem. The arrival upon substantial, concrete findings has therefore been hard but manageable.

Manuals and guidelines for humanitarian organisations of various natures were drawn upon to establish different factors. Though seemingly unrelated, military literature was also drawn upon, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the factors relating to exit strategy decisions. In conclusion, eight different factors that are involved in the exit strategy decision were arrived upon:

1. The project cycle
2. Internal coordination and communication
3. The context
4. External communication
5. The mandate/mission of the organisation
6. Visibility
7. Funding and resources
8. The human factor

Thereafter, the theoretical framework was integrated; a motivational basis in which each of these factors is grounded was discovered. In addition to this, contextual factors were given their own category, as they do not necessarily have a motivational basis in decision-making. In conclusion, these eight different factors were classified into four different influencing categories.

With the data made available primarily through interviews and additionally through the substantial information available publically, each organisation was analysed. The analysis was done by an examination of each individual factor. As a conclusion, a representative illustration of the decision-making pattern was made up, showing concretely how large each motivational basis was found to be in each organisation.
5.2. The main findings and conclusions

It has been highlighted in guidelines and in evaluations found for the different organisations that planned exit strategies have been much more effective and produced a better overall, long-term outcome (Gardner, Greenblott & Joubert, 2005; WFP, 2004; Global Protection Cluster, 2012; IASC, 1997). The current analysis of three different humanitarian organisations (MSF, IRC and World Vision) found that most exit strategies, however, still are ad-hoc, improvised exit strategies. Though more signs point towards thinking in a more sustainable direction in terms of exit strategies, especially in the case of World Vision.

After the data analysis, the first noticeable result was that there is no comparable pattern in between the three different organisations. Though the overall economic influence seemed the same, emphasis on other factors were different in each organisation. This means that all organisations determine exit strategies in a different way, albeit the economic factors were comparably the same.

The theoretical assumptions based on the theoretical approach of James March were confirmed. By taking a closer look at the nature of the mandate or mission factor at a holistic level and using the issue of sustainability, it was highlighted that the pre-imposed mandate or mission predetermines certain approaches in exit strategies. This has been demonstrated by looking at the extent of the mandate, and its influence on each individual organisation. It was found that the organisation with a more limiting mandate had more influence over the exit strategy decision than the organisations with a less limiting mandate.

The matter of sustainability of project impact has also been analysed. There it was found that those organisations with a longer-term mandate or mission were also more concerned with the sustainability of their project impact, especially when considering the exit strategy approach. Handover to local partners was seen by the IRC as an immediate way to improve sustainability of project impact for example. Yet this is still a hazardous
approach for MSF, as assurance of quality of services provided in projects could not be guaranteed.

The theoretical assumption that organisational structure is crucial in organisational decision-making has neither been confirmed nor discredited. However, it was found that in the case of organisational structure it is not so much the structure that matters but the individuals placed within those structures. The structure thus becomes important when considering the capacity of individuals to make important operational decisions such as exit strategy decisions. Organisational structure therefore becomes important when decisions are badly made, or without due consideration for other important issues. This was especially highlighted in the cases of MSF and IRC, which both had accounts of bad operational decision-making due to the individuals that were placed in positions to make such decisions.

5.3. Recommendations for further research

Firstly, the theoretical model created from different schools of thought is a preliminary model. These can be developed and tested further on other organisational decision-making, including other types of organisations.

Secondly, a more concrete research can be done on humanitarian approaches to exit strategies. This could be done not only from an operational point of view, but also from a human impact point of view. Most evaluations of humanitarian relief operations still divert much attention to operational procedures and effectiveness, rather than measuring the enduring project impact in the local context.

Thirdly, further research can also be put into the effect of organisational structure on decision-making in humanitarian organisations. Mostly, those closest and more familiar to the context in which humanitarian organisations operate, do not decide on any of those operational procedures. Research could focus on the negative and positive aspects of having such a decision-making structure.
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