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Leadership in UK Multi-Agency Emergency Co-ordination Groups: A Functional Approach (2nd Edition)

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Emergency Planning College Position Papers

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About this Paper

This paper was originally published as:

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The authors have decided to update it and re-issue it in the EPC Position Paper strand. This is because it has, since its publication, come to define the EPC's doctrine and approach to this aspect of emergency and crisis leadership. Therefore, we believe it is better placed as a Position Paper. It also needed several minor, but significant updates to reflect changes and developments that have occurred since its original publication.

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Introduction and Scope

This paper is not intended as a discussion of leadership in general. Its purpose is to define and briefly examine the functions of leaders in the local (strategic and tactical) multi-agency co-ordinating groups convened to manage civil emergencies in the UK. By local, we mean the level of the police force or constabulary area in England and Wales that mirrors the Local Resilience Forum. As such, it is concerned specifically with what those leaders need to do to make the local level of the UK national Concept of Operations for emergency management work in practice.

It complements a number of other publications, which can be seen in the bibliography. These include the Joint Emergency Services' Interoperability Principles (2013) *Joint Doctrine: The Interoperability Framework*, various examples of capstone guidance on emergency response and British Standards Institute publications on crisis management.

We are not concerned here with the generic attributes, traits or characteristics of leaders. Nor are we concerned with a philosophical discussion of the types of challenges and decisions they face. The focus of this paper is on what leaders in these groups actually have to do. In this way, we believe it both complements and usefully extends the content of existing guidance, doctrine and standards.

Tactical and local strategic co-ordinating groups are part of the UK Concept of Operations. They are multi-agency bodies with a diverse membership that is determined according to the needs of the emergency they are convened to manage. However, they should comprise people with experience of working and exercising together as part of their Local Resilience Forum. They are, for UK constitutional reasons, consensual co-ordinating groups and not command teams.

As such, they are led by a chairperson and not a commander. That person will usually be a police officer, but there is no reason why other agencies (such as local government or the health service) may not chair these groups when and if the emergency falls mostly within their domain and the consensus of the group reflects that.

We understand leadership in this context to mean the behaviours and actions of members of these groups as well as their chairs, since they are (in effect) multi-agency groups consisting of single-agency leaders. Each member has a leadership function within the co-ordinating group and in respect of the organisation they represent in it.

Where a function associated with leadership is specific to the chair, or a particular organisation, or a particular level (tactical or strategic), this will be noted. Otherwise, we consider them to be functions which are required to one extent or another of all members. In most cases, their discharge is a shared responsibility and we believe it is a requirement that members of tactical co-ordinating groups appreciate the overall



picture and can think “one level up”. That is to say, they should be able to understand the workings of the strategic level, appreciate the sort of challenges they face and anticipate their requirements.

The aim of the paper is to give those who may work in such groups, and who receive varying levels and types of training for it, a common and concise understanding of these functions. This will, it is hoped, help them prepare to be effective leaders within these multi-agency constructs. The result should be that members of these diverse agencies can work together more effectively, bring their own organisational assets to bear in a co-ordinated way and support the overall effort in a coherent, integrated manner.

The recommendations we make are not intended to be prescriptive or to be used as a checklist. However, we believe they reflect good practice and are consistent with relevant doctrine. They are designed for the guidance of practitioners, always with reference to local circumstances, conditions and the requirements of the emergency. The core functions identified and explained below are not presented in any particular order, although we would suggest that the first two are naturally pre-eminent.

Guidance on this subject has sometimes identified the first principle as the establishment and imposition of “command”. Putting aside for a moment doctrinal specifics in the UK (command is, in this context, a single-agency function, not a multi-agency one), we would suggest that this generalised notion should be boiled down to a rapid delivery of the first two of the core functions, along with a clarity around which agencies are doing what and what the chains of command and co-ordination are.

This is in keeping with our argument that, whilst the chair of a multi-agency co-ordinating group is not a commander (of anything other than his or her own organisation’s assets) – he or she must be a leader. Since this means exerting influence without constitutional or vested authority, it is probably a greater challenge. This supports the need for functional guidance on what leadership in this context means. This leads directly to our discussion of the core functions in the leadership of co-ordinating groups.

Finally, these functions sit alongside the statutory duties of the various members of the group, reflecting their different organisational responsibilities. These are not considered in this paper.



Preliminary Functions

The preliminary functions of leadership in co-ordinating groups revolve around setting up the response management structures and then ensuring that they are ready to work as required. We suggest the key elements of this are:

- Activating the group, according to local protocols;
- Notifying partners and stakeholders of this activation;
- Decide on the initial composition and location of the group, where options exist;
- Testing all communication links;
- Confirming that the co-ordinating group is properly staffed and able to start work;
- Acquiring initial situation reports;
- Briefing leaders and staff on the situation;
- Identifying the most urgent and immediate priorities to support the common objectives. These are identified in *Emergency Response and Recovery* (Cabinet Office, 2012) and elsewhere.

Core Function 1. Creating and Maintaining Shared Situational Awareness

A key early task for the members of a co-ordinating group, if not actually the first task, is to analyse the situation, take into account all that is known or may be safely presumed about it, and achieve a state of shared situational awareness. To some extent, the meaning of this is self-evident; it is an understanding of the situation that is shared by the group. But to grasp its fuller meaning, we need to appreciate that implies a little more than this.

It needs to answer the following questions:

- What has happened?
- What is happening now?
- What is being done about it?
- What has not or is not happening, that you might otherwise have expected?
- What are the likely impacts arising from this and the risks to the community, infrastructure and environment?
- On the basis of the facts and your assessment of impacts and risks, what might happen in the future?

Situational awareness is a cognitive state, achieved through three mental processes. These are:

- **Perception:** identifying the facts of the situation ;
- **Comprehension:** understanding what this means and implies;
- **Projection:** making judgements about potential outcomes and the future development of the emergency.

Situational awareness allows you to move beyond knowing what is going on, towards an understanding of its significance and eventually to a “mental model” of the way the situation is likely to develop – so that challenges can be anticipated.

It can also be rendered in cyclical form, as the first 3 stages in a cycle (shown below). Here perception, comprehension and projection are followed by decision and action, leading to observation of the outcome and a re-defined perception – and so on.

While situational awareness is an individual cognitive state, shared situational awareness is used to describe the achievement of similar states of situational awareness across a group who share a common interest, focus or objective.

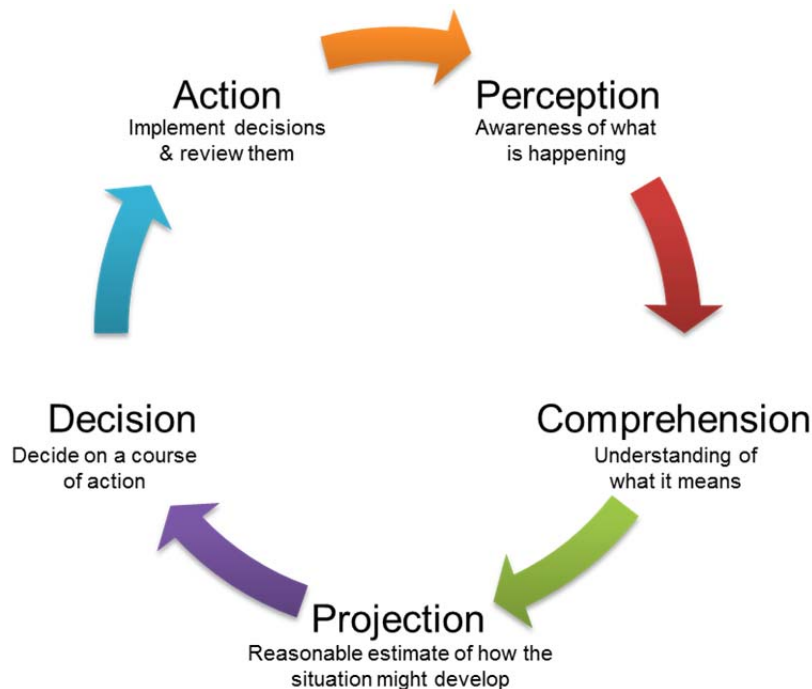


Figure 1: Cycle of Situational Awareness and Action

The acquisition and maintenance of shared situational awareness can help co-ordinating groups get “ahead” of the crisis, exert greater control over an unfolding and complex situation and think and plan more coherently and purposefully.



Attaining shared situational awareness requires leadership. It has to be created and maintained by co-ordinating groups that comprise many different agencies, with their own perspectives, priorities and ways of working. If it is to be “shared” and used by the group effectively it has to be accepted as the definitive basis of collective decision-making at a given time. This means that representatives of each agency must not only contribute to it and help shape it; they must also satisfy themselves that they agree with it.

How is it developed and maintained? We suggest that this is done by a trained situational analysis team, on the basis of input from all the agencies involved and the different tiers of response, and articulated in a continuously updated brief that is freely shared among those with a legitimate need to see it. It follows that it should be produced by the highest level of co-ordinating group which is active in the local management of the emergency, to avoid duplication and uncertainty. It may be articulated in a rolling brief that, in common with other inputs, constitutes what we term a common operating picture.

Responders should be aware of the possible influence of a range of innate or acquired cognitive biases and heuristics that can challenge their objectivity and shape their interpretation of information. The nature of these biases and heuristics is beyond the scope of this paper, but they are very well documented. The key point is that their influence cannot be entirely eliminated; decision-makers need to be aware of their potential influence and strive to mitigate their impact, because they are obstacles to creating effective shared situational awareness. The following tools will help them in that purpose. They are of demonstrated relevance and utility to those managing and interpreting information in complex and dynamic situations:

- **Persistent Questioning.** This involves the repeated drill of probing one’s current understanding of the situation by asking the 6 questions identified above, with reference at all times to what is known definitely, what is or may be presumed (with what degree of certainty) and also what is unknown or of uncertain reliability. It involves a nuanced and dynamic understanding of the scale, potential duration and impacts (which will be multiple and may be contingent) of the emergency.
- **STEEPOLE analysis.** This involves deconstructing the emergency according to categories of its implication and meaning. It is an acronym, standing (in no particular order of importance) for:

- S Social & welfare dynamics of the problem
- T Technical or technological aspects
- E Economic impacts
- E Environmental significance
- P Political ramifications
- O Organisational implications for agencies affected
- L Legal implications
- E Relevant ethical considerations

- **Deliberate Challenging of Assumptions.** All estimates, plans and arrangements are based on assumptions. Some may be safe and relatively reliable. Others may be more “load-bearing”, in that if they are wrong then so will be the choices based on them. Assumptions need to be identified, examined and challenged very carefully – especially in the multi-agency context where they may be made about the capability, capacity and operational tempo of partner agencies.
- **Impact Trees.** These identify, in diagrammatical form, the related and interdependent impacts of an emergency. They are especially useful for capturing secondary and tertiary impacts, and help create a holistic understanding of the impacts of the emergency. They can also help reduce the capacity for surprise and identify interdependencies that might not be immediately visible. An example is given below.

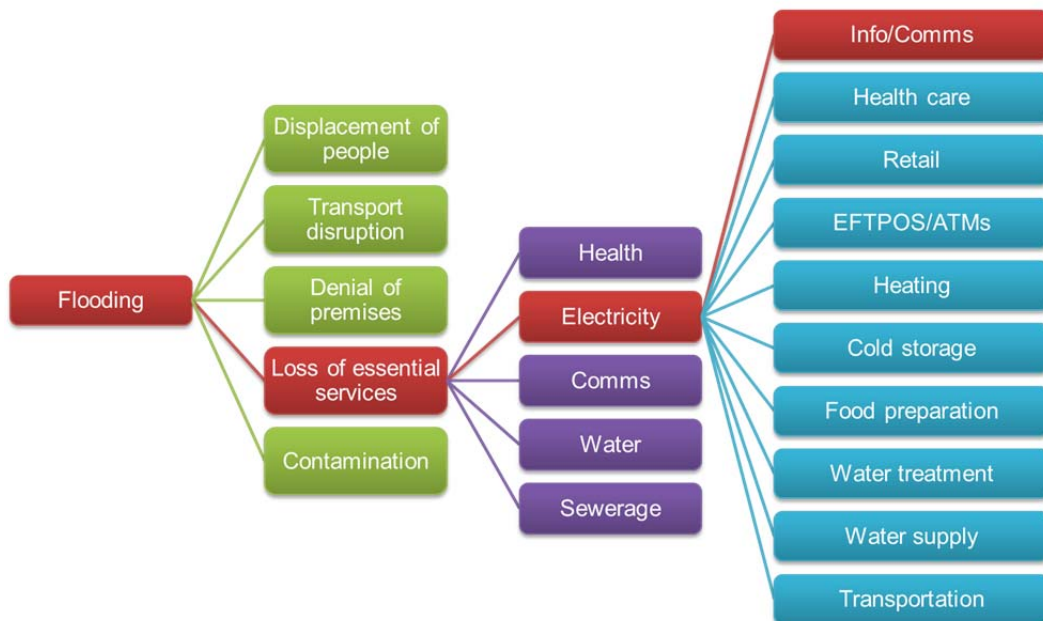


Figure 2: A Specimen Impact Tree



- **Assessment of data and information.** The adage ‘Garbage in, Garbage Out’ applies in most contexts, and very definitely in emergency and crisis management. A systematic, robust and clear-minded assessment of the accuracy, timeliness, completeness and relevance of information received will assist decision makers with the most reliable evidence base possible in the circumstances. Selective, careless or biased analysis of information (e.g. prioritising consistent or positive information over that which is dissonant or negative) will undermine the response as a whole. Particular questions and challenges to consider are:
 - What is known, unclear, caveated and presumed?
 - Are the criteria for these judgments established, clear and commonly understood?
 - Does evidence from one source conflict with or corroborate that from other sources?
 - Is there any anomalous evidence? If so, might it support a different interpretation/direction?
 - What is unknown? What gaps in evidence or understanding can be identified?
 - What steps are you taking to resolve uncertainties?

We recognise that in the very early stages of organising a coherent response, the detailed application of these tools may appear to be unrealistically time-consuming. However, we would argue that:

- As emergencies evolve and mature, the opportunity and resource to do it is more likely to be available;
- As time elapses, the failure to carry out recordable and structured analyses of these types may become increasingly difficult to defend;
- A record of analysis based on such auditable and commonly-recognised tools is a powerful enabler of defensible decision-making.

Once a robust state of shared situational awareness is achieved, the next key task for strategic leaders is to use it to determine the strategy and strategic aim of the response.

For further reading on the creation and maintenance of shared situational awareness, and more detail on the tools and ideas that can help practitioners achieve it, we suggest you refer to:

- MacFarlane, R. (2015) *Decision-Support Tools for Risk, Emergency and Crisis Management*. Emergency Planning College Position Paper Number 1. Easingwold: EPC



- MacFarlane, R and Leigh, M. (2014) *Information Management and Shared Situational Awareness*. Emergency Planning College Occasional Paper Number 12. Easingwold: EPC

Core Function 2. Determining Strategy, the Strategic Aim and Objectives

These are separated at this stage because they represent different functions; the first is to determine strategy for the overall response effort and the second is to articulate it in a useful aim that guides other and subordinate decision-makers, with objectives for different agencies to work towards (collectively).

These should be clearly aligned to the aim and also explicit and as specific as possible, identifying what each agency is expected to do or deliver in support of the aim. We suggest that generic objectives and pre-scripted aims are unlikely to provide this degree of focus.

When determining the strategy, we suggest that consideration is given to the end, the ways and the means:

- The desired **end-state**. This involves clarifying what a successful resolution of the emergency should look like. What do you want to have achieved?
- The general **ways** in which this should be achieved;
- The **means** required to bring it about.

By setting a joint strategy, leaders can ensure that subordinates and partners are working towards a common goal. This needs a consensus and acceptance across the range of contributing agencies.

This may then be articulated in a specific, focussed aim for the guidance of other and subordinate decision-makers. It is worth noting that generic, vague or formulaic strategic aims may not be enough to give other leaders (especially subordinate ones) the confidence to make informed and defensible choices when faced with multiple options that need quick resolution. They need to be able to identify which of those multiple options actually stands the best chance of delivering or supporting the aim.

A key suggestion is that leaders do not try to capture everything they want to see happen in the aim. Multiple subordinate clauses and a shopping list of things to do or “bear in mind” will only rob it of precision, clarity and utility at the point of use. It could also fail those who might depend on it for guidance, when faced with difficult choices and dilemmas that need quick resolution in trying circumstances. Experience of training senior officers in the definition of an aim proves that it is an art that needs to be practiced and reflected upon.

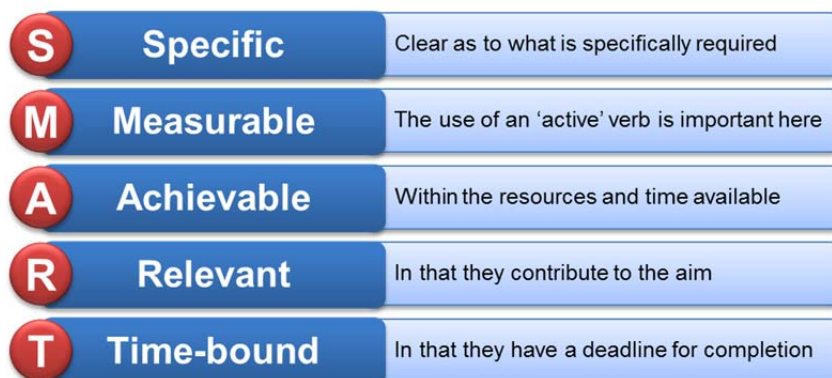
The aim should be underpinned and enabled by objectives for the different responding agencies, to ensure that multi-agency effort is directed consistently towards a common, commonly understood and shared goal. We suggest that these single-agency objectives are best defined at the tactical level, within the overall strategic aim. This frees tactical leaders to concentrate on how to deliver the aim within their tactical plan. It also serves to focus the attention of strategic leaders on what should be achieved, rather than the detail of how it may be achieved. In other words, strategists dictate the “what”. Tacticians decide the “how”.

We suggest that the following tools are helpful in defining the aim and its supporting objectives:

- **The Aim.** As a flexible rule-of-thumb, we suggest that the aim should be:
 - Singular – giving one overall condition to be brought about.
 - Expressed as an “active” verb in the infinitive.
 - Short and memorable, preferably expressed in one concise sentence.
 - Subject to sense-check by its authors, who should ask themselves ... “would this give me, when faced with difficult choices and multiple options, the confidence to identify (quickly) which choice best supports the overall aim”.
 - Influenced by the Common Objectives as identified in Cabinet Office *Emergency Response and Recovery* (2013). These make saving life the main priority, and lists 7 other key principles as well.

This strategy and the strategic aim must be communicated to the tactical co-ordinating group and, ideally, discussed with its chair to ensure complete understanding. The tactical leaders should use this to derive objectives for each agency or groups of agencies working together.

- **Objectives.** These should be SMART. This is an acronym, standing for:



We also suggest that the aim and objectives are made explicit and disseminated to all decision-makers and their support staff. Also, and as with the current state of



shared situational awareness, they should be continuously examined to ensure that they are still appropriate and optimal – and get changed as the situation dictates.

So far, we have identified some clear functional priorities for leaders in multi-agency co-ordinating groups. These are:

- The creation, maintenance and expression of shared situational awareness;
- Its use to drive the identification of strategy, a strategic aim and agency objectives;
- Their expression of all of the above in an evolving form termed here the common operating picture;
- These imply other functions that we believe are critical tasks for leaders. These enabling functions include:
 - Deconstructing problems, so that the wider – less obvious – implications of emergencies can be identified and understood. These problems are likely to be more complex and dilemma-based at the strategic level, when compared to the tactical level;
 - Evaluating the accuracy, reliability and relevance of information;
 - Identifying and evaluating options, in the context of a given aim or set of objectives, before choosing the most appropriate. Again, at the strategic level these options are likely to be less clear-cut, more complex and less well-structured than at the tactical level;
 - Staying “in role”, and avoiding unwarranted interference in the activities of subordinate tiers of co-ordination;
 - Communicating and sharing information with a wide range of stakeholders – down, up and sideways in the hierarchy of response.

Other functional tasks for leaders in co-ordinating groups will now be addressed, in no particular order of importance.

Core Function 3. Making Timely Decisions

The two core functions identified above resolve the group’s shared understanding of the challenge facing it and what its direction of travel should be – in other words the situation and the general direction they must take. That leads to action, and the need to determine:

- What do we need to do now?
- What do we need to find out?
- What do we need to do next?



- What do we need to communicate?
- What might we need to do in the future?

A key feature of leadership decision-making in crises and emergencies (which is perhaps not quite so salient in normal business) is the need for decisions to be made quickly, in conditions of uncertainty and before all the “required” information is available. This requires all members to make a conscious determination not to delay or defer decisions without very good cause.

It is an anecdotal truism, but a widely held one, that in some circumstances any decision is better than no decision. But responders will naturally be concerned about whether or not they know enough to make a safe and effective choice, in the knowledge that it may be subject to scrutiny later. It should help them if they remember:

- The Common Objectives for responders, as given in *Emergency Response and Recovery* (Cabinet Office, 2012). Saving and protecting human life is the main overall objective;
- The need for decisions to be reasonable and defensible at the time, rather than being driven by a concern with being “right”, when this assessment is only possible with hindsight;
- More facts do not equal more (useful) information;
- Making decisions is the *raison d’etre* of a co-ordinating group;
- The collective use of a recognised decision process, such as the Joint Decision Model (JDM), is a powerful support. It not only improves decision-making; it also lends credibility and authority to the result. A wide range of decision-making models exists, and the practically useful ones are generally organized around three primary considerations.
 - **Situation:** What is happening, what are the impacts, what are the risks, what might happen and what is being done about it? Having *situational awareness* is having an appropriate knowledge of these factors.
 - **Direction:** What end-state is desired, what is the aim and objectives of the crisis response and what overarching values and priorities will inform and guide this?
 - **Action:** What needs to be decided, and what needs to be done to resolve the situation and achieve the desired end state?
- The JDM is shown below. Use of this common approach and trusted mechanism should boost the confidence of group members when they are tempted to delay vital decisions in the hope of more gaining more information.

Key references at this stage are:

- MacFarlane, R. (2015) *Decision-Support Tools for Risk, Emergency and Crisis Management*. Emergency Planning College Position Paper Number 1. Easingwold: EPC
- MacFarlane, R and Leigh, M. (2014) *Information Management and Shared Situational Awareness* Emergency Planning College Occasional Paper Number 12. Easingwold: EPC
- (JESIP) Joint Emergency Services' Interoperability Programme (2013) *Joint Doctrine: The Interoperability Framework*.



Figure 3: The Joint Decision Model (after JESIP, 2013: 13)

A key strength of the JDM is that it can support both fast and slower-time, more reflective decision-making. British responders are trained to apply it at the front-line, operational level and up to work of tactical and strategic co-ordinating groups.

Core Function 4. Approving and Supporting the Plans of Subordinate Levels

The chair and members of a strategic co-ordinating group will wish to scrutinise and approve the tactical co-ordinating group's plan for the delivery of the overall strategic aim (this is often called the "tactical plan"). It follows that the strategic leaders have responsibility to ensure that the tactical team (or teams) have the resources they



require to do this. This may require them to source external (such as national) assets or mutual aid and prioritise their deployment.

It also follows that it is a function of the tactical co-ordinating group to agree a tactical plan, communicate it to the operational leaders, monitor its implementation and support it with resources as required (which may need referral to the strategic level).

Strategic leaders will certainly wish to monitor the progress of the tactical plan and periodically review it for continuing compliance with the strategic aim. This implies fairly continuous dialogue between the leaders of both groups, further reinforcing the need for both to “stay in role” and remain focussed on their defined levels of responsibility.

Similarly, tactical leaders will be concerned with approving and supporting the actions, intentions and priorities of the operational level. The emphasis is on support, rather than direction. The principle of subsidiarity, as expressed in the UK National Concept of Operations, applies.

Core Function 5. Liaising with Central Government

This is a key function of leaders, and especially the chair, within a strategic co-ordinating group. It can be assumed that an emergency serious enough to warrant formation of a local strategic co-ordinating group will provoke some level of central government interest. This may or may not escalate to the full activation of a multi-ministry response via the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR).

It may be restricted to the single Lead Government Department that is responsible for that type of emergency. Either way, there will be a requirement for the chair to liaise directly with central government from time to time. He or she will, therefore, require the support of other group members in (for example) the design of briefs for government, responses to information requests and the evaluation and implementation of central government advice and offers of assistance. He or she may also require advice on the availability and utility of national assets, from central government and from experts within the group.

This level of liaison may also include dealing with central government representatives at the sub-national tier, especially when it is playing a co-ordinating role – such as when multiple strategic co-ordinating groups are active. SCG chairs and members can expect to have a Government Liaison Officer (GLO) and their supporting team join their group if the emergency has a significant level of government interest. This may require channels of communication and information sharing with the Department of Communities and Local Government’s Resilience and Emergencies Division (RED). The Government Liaison Officer will be a core member of the decision-making team.



Core Function 6. Identifying and Committing Single-Agency Resources

The chair of any co-ordinating group will expect agency representatives to be able to identify and commit their organisation's resources, with a minimum of referral upwards. Therefore, representatives must have the level of knowledge, expertise and authority, appropriate for whichever level of group they are working in.

Core Function 7. Requesting and Providing Scientific and Technical Advice and Additional Assets.

If the provision of scientific and technical advice is your role, whether as a member of the strategic group's scientific and technical advice cell or as representative of a single agency at either level, there is an expectation that advice will be as definitive as possible in the light of available knowledge.

The chair and the group will seek options with a documented assessment of the risks associated with each, to guide their decision-making. The principles of assessing information and challenging premises, assumptions, interpretations and conclusions, as introduced above, apply equally to scientific and technical data and advice as they do to any other form.

Additional assets might include:

- Mutual aid;
- Assets subject to single-service mobilisation plans;
- Military assistance.

Local and national protocols cover these in detail. A key function for the chair of a co-ordinating group could be adjudication between competing claims for these and other assets at their level. Where there are multiple local SCGs asking for support from national assets, the adjudication will normally be carried out in COBR.

Core Function 8. Ensuring that Decisions are Reasonable, Defensible and Recorded

There is no expectation that all decisions will, with hindsight, turn out to be correct. But there is a requirement that they are (and are seen to be) reasonable in terms of what was known at the time - as well as necessary, proportionate and legal. This implies the need to record decisions. A fully recorded decision should, we suggest, include at least:



- A summary of the issue;
- The options that were considered;
- The risks attached to them, and;
- The rationale for the decision.

It is a shared function to ensure that decisions the group is collectively responsible for are justified and recorded in this way. This applies at the tactical and strategic level. Responders should also consider multi-media methods of recording their deliberations and decisions, as well as the need for detailed minutes of the meeting as a whole – in addition to recording decisions.

Core Function 9. Managing the Public Information Effort and Dealing with the Media

Doing this is a natural function of the strategic co-ordinating group, if one is active. In fact, significant levels of media interest may be reason in itself for the activation of such a group. Placing media liaison at this level relieves the burden on tactical co-ordinating groups and allows them to concentrate on implementation of the response. SCGs often form a multi-agency media/communications team for this purpose.

It also allows the media response to be managed where the strategic overview and the “bigger picture” is collated and maintained. Given the primacy of the media in the shaping of public perception, it is vital that public information strategies and content reflect, reinforce and (if necessary) defend the strategic aim.

What does that mean in functional terms? We suggest the following:

- Use any or all forms of media to get the required messages to the public, so that they know what is happening, what responders are doing and what they should in the interests of their own safety.
- Manage expectations on the part of the public as to what responders will be able to do for them and when.
- Identify and articulate the “lines to take”; these represent the core message(s) that all responders and agencies need to reflect and cohere with in their collective and separate interaction with the media;
- Prepare, or at least approve the content of, key press releases and other major public announcements;
- Hold press conferences and public meetings as appropriate, mindful of the different information needs of different groups and communities;



- Ensure that what is being said in all forms of the media is monitored and, where appropriate, responded to credibly and robustly;
- Make proactive use of all forms of media to, wherever possible, lead and shape the public debate. Social media is crucial here and central; it should not be regarded as an “optional extra” in a communication strategy. It needs to be monitored and reacted to, as well as being used proactively.

It is widely recognised now as unrealistic to expect to manage and control the media. Their reaction time is too quick. 24/7 coverage means the demand for information is incessant and digital social media is a largely unregulated and unpredictable force. This actually makes it more important for the public information effort to be managed at the highest possible level, where – for example - threats to reputation and direct criticism of the response would most naturally be dealt with.

Note also that the SCG can expect to receive Top Lines briefings issued by central government.

Core Function 10. Reviewing the Composition of the Co-ordinating Group

The chair of a group, in consultation with the members, needs to initially define and then periodically review its composition. This is to ensure that the right agencies are represented in the first place, and are given the opportunity to step down when no longer needed, or step up when needed. This is because the needs of the group for expertise and organisational input will naturally change as the emergency develops, and it is a principle that agencies should not be represented unless their input is actually needed at that level.

If this discipline is not maintained by chairs and members, the size of the group might make it unnecessarily difficult to manage and support – something that could impede progress and compromise the response. We suggest this review is an item on the agenda of every co-ordinating group meeting.

Embedded within this function is the implied need to ensure that all responders, participating agencies and stakeholders are aware of the chains of single-agency command and multi-agency co-ordination. The identity of the chair may also be subject to review, if the emergency develops and migrates clearly into the domain of another agency.

Core Function 11. Setting the Timings, Location and Agenda of Co-ordinating Group Meetings

There are several factors that need to be taken into account here. They include:



- The pace and tempo of the emergency;
- The urgency of tasks and objectives that have to be considered;
- The information and briefing needs of higher or lower tiers, which might impose deadlines on your own group's programme;
- The time needed for subordinate tiers to actually deliver and report back on the objectives they have been given;
- Any practicalities, such as travel time for members and time for the situation cell and information managers to make sense of what is happening and manage the development of shared situational awareness.

The decision will involve a balance. There may be times of apparent urgency to meet, when a slight delay would give shared situational awareness a chance to resolve the issues for decision-makers. This is a leadership decision, and members should look to support and guide the chair.

The location of the group's support activities and meetings is a key consideration. Communications, facilities and convenience are key elements of the choice. Proximity to the emergency is not.

Regarding the agenda; we suggest that groups use the template provided in JESIP (2013: 27)

Core Function 12. Controlling and Capturing Financial Costs

The need for this is self-evident, and essentially represents the extension of good governance into emergency management. But it should be said that any attempt to recover funds after the emergency will be unnecessarily complicated, if not impossible, without the appropriate audit trail.

Core Function 13. Chairing Co-ordinating Group Meetings

Inevitably, chairs will impose their own style on the conduct of meetings, but it is possible to suggest certain principles:

- Meetings should be short, very business-like and focussed on the agenda; they should not usually be treated as discussion fora. A high degree of "meeting discipline" is expected of the chair and all members, to ensure that the agenda is completed as quickly as is practicable.
- The statement of shared situational awareness is available for scrutiny beforehand and is not normally subject to debate at the meeting;



- Members must come prepared to report authoritatively and definitively against their organisation’s objectives, summarise its current activities and confirm its capabilities and resources;
- One log-keeper should record the meeting, or transcribe it from audio/visual recording – before sharing the minutes as quickly as possible.
- It is important that the Chair does not also represent his or her own organisation. If the organisation needs to be represented, it should be by another officer of appropriate rank so that the Chair can remain neutral.

Core Function 14. Exercise Executive Oversight of Internal Resilience and Safety Issues

The chair and members of a co-ordinating group need to anticipate and manage issues around business continuity management, health and safety and the general welfare of all responders. This relates, of course, to the legal duty to provide a safe scheme of work (which is not abrogated in emergencies) and the common law duty of care. It also includes the professional duty to plan for continuity and sustainability of the response and business-as-usual.

Core Function 15. Select and Periodically Review the Location of the Co-ordinating Group

Even if local arrangements have a default location for a co-ordinating group, it should be reviewed from time to time, to ensure that the location is the optimum one as the needs and character of the emergency change over time. If the leadership (chair) of a group migrates from one agency to another, this should probably trigger a review of its optimal location.

Core Function 16. Look Forward and Create the Structures for Recovery Management

This is a strategic matter. The design, staffing and leadership of the Recovery Co-ordinating Group, and its constituent sub-groups, will need careful and early consideration. So will the process of “passing the baton” when the response groups stand down. This will require planning, documentation and clear, agreed position on when it should take place.

Core Function 17. Create the Mechanisms for Effective Debriefing and Lesson Identification



The need for these is self-evident and well understood, but the functional leadership role is to ensure that the associated processes are well-managed, supported by all concerned and, above all, rigorous.

Summary and Conclusions

This is a brief paper and we have not had the space for a full examination of leadership in co-ordinating groups. The intention was to focus on the main functions of leaders in that context, and we have identified and described 17 of them above – which we have called Core Functions. There are, of course, other aspects of leadership and essential attributes they should be able to demonstrate if they are to inspire people to follow and support them. There are also skills they need if they are to carry out the core functions we have identified. We recognise the importance of these factors, but they are beyond the scope of this particular paper.

We believe that levels of training and readiness for roles in co-ordinating groups are not as well developed as they should be, at least in organisations outside the emergency services. This is problematic because these agencies are not merely supporting players. If the UK Concept of Operations is to be applied as it should, and multi-agency co-ordinating groups work as they should (as consensual decision-making fora), a more common and consistent level of competence and preparedness across all the partner agencies is needed.

The price of having an under-informed and ill-prepared non-blue light community is excessive dominance by the emergency services and the police in particular. We believe that the police do not generally look for that, want it or necessarily feel comfortable with it. But it is a product of the situation they often find themselves in, because some of their partners are under-prepared for the job and over-reliant on direction from the emergency services. For their part, not all sections of the “blue-light” community freely acknowledge the possibility or desirability of leadership from the non-blue light sectors.

Therefore, in this paper we set out to give chairs and members of co-ordinating groups a short summary of the key functions required of them in their role. It should help potential members and chairs to identify and understand the key practical tasks they will be required to carry out together. As such, it mirrors the general outline of training delivered currently for chairs and members at the Emergency Planning College.



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