Handling the Unthinkable: Public Safety Leadership in Unconventional Crises

Trainer(s):

Lt. Ricardo Ubinas
Tampa Police Department
and Indian River State College
http://www.tcpublicsafetytraining.com/
Public Safety Leadership in Unconventional Crises
Goals

Structures, Processes, and People

1. Open our eyes to the unconventional
2. Culture change
3. Whole of Community
4. A new analytical framework
5. Leave here with questions & inspiration
Current Threat Assessments

• US Worldwide Threat Assessment, Director of National Intelligence - February 2015
Table Top Exercise #1 - Aiken
Unstoppable
The Real Runaway Train
THE CHALLENGE OF THE UNTHINKABLE
The Challenge of the Unthinkable

Typology of Unconventional Crises

• Catastrophic Events
• Insidious Events
• Cascading Events
• Hyper-complex Events
The Challenge of the Unthinkable

What, then is so unconventional about the 2004 tsunami, Ebola outbreak, Hurricane Katrina or even the financial crisis?

• Networks
  – stakeholders
  – Technological sophistication & interdependence of infrastructure systems

• The human element
Why Prepare for the Unconventional

• Crisis spectrum line no longer runs from upper left to lower right
• Increased probability of high consequence incidents, certainty of the unthinkable
• Unthinkable = Unthought of
• Culture change
  – Don’t ruin the exercise
  – We all must accept that the unthinkable will happen
Catastrophic Events

The Three Horseman of the Apocalypse

• 9/11
• Hurricane Katrina
• 2004 Tsunami
Insidious Events

• Swine flu pandemic
• Ebola pandemic
• Civil unrest
• STUXNet
Cascading Events

• Northeast Blackout, 2003
• UK fuel protest
• Loss of CI/KR (public telecommunications)
• Loss of trust
Hypercomplex Events

1. Technical complexity
2. Complex geography
3. Cross-systemic complexity
4. Complex map of actors
5. Information complexity
Technical Complexity

- Critical infrastructures impacted
- Human infrastructures impacted
- Political instability
- Lack of technical knowledge amongst responders
Complex Geography

• No single “ground zero”
• Epidemics
• Affect flows/systems as well as places
  – Anthrax
  – Y2K
Cross-systemic Complexity

- Y2K
- 9/11
- Mutation
- Social consequences
Complex Maps of Actors

• Sheer numbers
  – Refugees
  – Evacuees
  – Fatalities

• Sheer variety

• NGO’s

• Foreign aid

• Can jeopardize response efforts with different goals
Information

- Volume of information
- Volume & variety of information producers/sources
- Hardware issues
- Reliability
- Fidelity loss due to difference in semantics or social/cultural contexts
- Information is not the “Holy Grail”
Lessons Observed

• Liquefaction
• The crucial role of information
• The importance of leadership
• The challenges of coordination
“Liquefaction”

- Liquefaction of systemic foundations
- 9/11 – NORAD
- Control of hubs/critical nodes
- Creation of ad hoc sub-units
- Loss of trust
  - Stun effect
  - Leaders struggle to accomplish their mission
  - Public’s expectations are excessive
The Crucial Role of Information

• Challenges to collect, verify and interpret information
• Social sensing often not activated
• Lack of two-way information sharing
• Stovepiping
• Hierarchical architectures
• Lack of perfect information
The Importance of Leadership

- Expect and embrace “de facto” leaders
  - Actions of “theoretical” leaders
  - Ops tempo can empower lower levels leaders-risk taking
- A change in leadership culture
  - Remove obstacles
  - Support & shield ad hoc leaders
- A change in planning
  - Pre-crisis leadership
The Challenges of Coordination

- A tradition of public sector leadership in crisis response
  - NRP “plans” courses of action for private/NGO's & identifies who should be allowed to participate (ESFs)
- The influence of big companies and big NGOs
  - Public interest/public voice must be paramount
- A new social contract
  - Share strategic leadership
- Alignment instead of coordination
  - Share a common purpose
  - One single broad strategy
Sensemaking

Asking the Right Questions

1. What is the essence of the crisis?
2. What are the critical pitfalls?
3. Who are the unconventional stakeholders?
4. What game-changing initiatives can be taken to recover traction on events?
1. What is the Essence of the Crisis?

- The danger of premature labels
- Labeling crises down
- The illusion of self-evident characterizations
- Against technical categorizations: the human dimension
- Categorizing oneself
The Danger of Premature Labels

• Labels can be lethal
• Responders are prodded to pick a simple, single word label
• Assumption that organizations will have a clearer sense of purpose if the crisis has a label
• A leader’s credibility can be dependent on how quickly they can diagnose and label a crisis
• Temptation to pick a label for which an off the shelf plan already exists
• Media pressure
Labeling Crises Down

• These types of incidents are labeled down as minor and swept off the radars
• Remain off the radar, under alarm thresholds and are underestimated
• Crime in Central America
• Ebola epidemic
The Illusion of Self-Evident Characterizations

- Hurricane Katrina - Category 5 hurricane
  - Something more emerges
- SARS
  - Not just a public health emergency; policies for schools, closing parts of the city, stop public gatherings, jail policies, racial tensions
- H1N1 in 2009
  - Not just public health but a social and economic disruption also
- Foot and mouth disease in UK in 2001
  - Self-evident labels don’t mischaracterize the crisis but more dangerously, only highlight one facet of the crisis
Against Technical Categorizations: The Human Dimension

• The missing human dimension in labels
  – Human element most challenging
  – We “type” events by abstract rationales i.e. law, asset-based interpretation of business continuity
  – We don’t categorize by human impacts, i.e. uncertainty, loss of trust, despair, despondency, defiance

• Anthrax crisis, 2001
  – emotional & psychological impact
  – Effects of an unknown, uncertainty, fear

• Hurricane Katrina
  – Emergence of irrational behaviors
Categorizing Oneself

• Categorize your organization
  – Readiness

• We contribute to creation of unconventional crises by accepting unconventionally weak foundations

• The danger is to fall under the illusion that what we face is unconventional *per se*. What is unconventional is our inability to take into account vulnerabilities which we ourselves created.
2. What are the Critical Pitfalls?

1. Groupthink and conventional paradigms
2. Lethal unintended consequences
3. Self-defeating plans
4. Loss of trust
5. Mismanaging imperfect information
6. Leaving ethical questions unresolved
7. Ready-made thought processes
8. The artificial reassertion of normalcy: fighting the last war
9. Failures of imagination: the illusion of relevance
10. Stovepipes and blind spots in partnerships
3. Who are the Unconventional Stakeholders?

• Unthinkable” crises will entirely reshuffle three “ecosystems” to the point of making their internal makeup, structure, and dynamics, as well as their systemic interconnections unrecognizable: namely those of response stakeholders (*leaders* and *spoilers*), victims, and “relevant observers.”

• A surge of stakeholders

• A shift of relevance
4. What actions can be done to recover traction on events?

- Unconventional crises thrive in the interstices of defense systems and the blind spots of radar screens: yet they are not so apocalyptic in nature that they do not themselves have soft underbellies, or cannot be flanked.
- We don’t want to replace a planned list of actions with another planned list of actions, the actions could be many.
- Two strategic categories of challenges and their thought processes emerge;
  1. Create unconventional coalitions
     - Pre-crisis efforts
       • Planning
       • Exercising
     - Crisis
       • Seat at the table
  2. Recovering control over the pace of the incident
CHAOS
The Edge of Chaos

- Chaos is normal
- Expect chaos, anticipate “shock & awe”
- Chaos is created by complex parts
- Chaos cannot be managed
- Chaos must be manipulated and guided
- Sensmaking
Shock & Awe

• Trauma shock – (physiological)
• Ambiguity shock (cognitive) - confusion caused by too many interpretations
  – Hurricane Katrina
• Uncertainty shock (cognitive) - ignorance of any interpretations
  – September 11th
Working in the Edge of Chaos

Five Tenets of Working in Chaos

1. Find the right incident commander
2. Not every incident has a play book
3. Manipulation and improvisation are not dirty words
4. Find leverage points and create mental slides
5. The party already started...you’re late
SENSEMAKING
Sensemaking

Unconventional events do not wage attrition wars or siege warfare, but wars of movement. What they require from leaders and their advisers, therefore, is the ability to meet speed with speed, think on their feet, be adaptive, and ask the right questions, instead of engaging in a futile attempt to dig successive trench lines of supposed “right answers” that systematically will be overtaken by events.
Sensemaking

• The making of sense

• The process of “structuring the unknown” by “placing stimuli into some kind of framework” that enables us “to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict”.

• When should sensemaking be used?

• Cynefin Framework
How Does Sensemaking Help?

- Precursor for more effective action
- Mapping an unfamiliar event
- Allows responders cognitively see an incident and talk about what’s happening, multiple interpretations
- Plausibility
How Do You Do Effective Sensemaking?

• Exploring the wider system
  – Seek out many types and sources of data.
  – Involve others as you try to make sense of any situation.
  – Move beyond stereotypes.
  – Be sensitive to operations.

• Create a map of the current situation
  – Don’t simply overlay your existing framework on a new situation.
  – Put the emerging situation into a new framework to provide organizational members with order.
How Do You Do Effective Sensemaking?

• Act to change the system to learn more about it
  – Learn from small experiments
  – People create their own environments and are then constrained by them.
Sensemaking Under Stress

Stress effects:

• Focus on the short term, to the neglect of longer-term considerations;

• Fall back on and rigidly cling to old and deeply rooted behavioral patterns (often forgetting more recent ones);

• Narrow and deepen their span of attention, scrutinizing ‘central’ issues while neglecting ‘peripheral’ ones;

• Be more likely to stereotype;

• Be more easily irritable;
Knowledge

• Knowns
• Known unknowns
• Unknown unknowns
• Unknowable unknowns
Decision Making Models

- Rational Analytical Decision Making
- OODA Loop
- Complexity Theory (Cynefin Framework)
- Recognition Primed Decision Making
- Exploration and Exploitation Decision Making
Rational Analytical Decision Making

What is the problem I am trying to solve?

What are the different ways I could solve this problem?

Option 1
Option 2
Option 3
Option 4

Which option is the best?

Option 2
Decision Making Power

The ability to make decisions in crisis situations involves certain sources of power:

• Intuition
• Mental simulation
• Metaphor
• Storytelling
Experience the situation in a changing context.

- Recognition has four aspects:
  - Cues
  - Goals
  - Expectancies
  - Action

- Mental simulation of action
  - Will it work?
    - YES
    - NO

- Are expectancies violated?
  - YES
  - NO

- Seek more information
  - Reassess the situation

- Is the situation familiar?
  - YES
  - NO

Experience the situation in a changing context.

**EXPLORATION**

Scan the environment:
- Agents
- Populations
- Artifacts
- Interactions

What is the right balance between variety and uniformity?
What should interact with what and when?
Which agents or strategies should be copied and which should be destroyed?

**EXPLOITATION**

Is the situation familiar?

Recognition has four aspects:
- Cues
- Goals
- Expectancies
- Action

**Mental simulation of action**

Could it increase overall system stabilization?

**If Expectancies Are Violated**

**Modify**

**Implement**
Complex Theory
Decision Making

- **COMPLEX**
  - probe
  - sense
  - respond

- **COMPLICATED**
  - sense
  - analyze
  - respond

- **CHAOTIC**
  - act
  - sense
  - respond

- **DISORDER**
  - sense
  - categorize
  - respond

- **SIMPLE**
  - sense
  - respond

- **ORDERED**

- **UNORDERED**
Cynefin Framework
SIMPLE DOMAIN

- Known knowns
- $C = E$
- Sense – categorize – respond
- Best practice, SOPs
COMPLICATED DOMAIN

- Known unknowns
- C ➔ E
- Sense – analyze – respond
- Analysis
- Experts

ORDERED
COMPLEX DOMAINT

• Unknown unknowns
• CE
• Probe – sense – respond
• Emergent practices
CHOTIC DOMAIN

- Unknowable unknowns
- C ≠ E
- Act – sense – respond
- Novel Practice
If you don’t know where you are at, you are in “Disorder”

Gather more info on what you know or identify what you don’t know.

Get enough information to move to a more defined domain.
What can be done to gain traction on an incident?

• Ask the right questions
  – What has happened here? What am I trying to accomplish? What do I recognize in this event? What have I never seen or heard about before? What do I know? What do I need to know? What can I begin to do?

• Create unconventional coalitions

• Recover control over the pace of the crisis
Creativity & Innovation
READINESS
High Reliability Organizations

• Corporate human resource management models
  – Weick & Sutcliffe model
  – Erickson & Dyer model
High Reliability Organizations

• Create a mindful infrastructure that continually does the following:
  – Tracks small failures
  – Resist oversimplifications
  – Remains sensitive to operations
  – Maintains capabilities for resilience
  – Takes advantage of shifting locations of expertise
Strategic Human Resources Management Model of High Reliability Organization Performance

Reliability-enhancing HR strategy
- Embed an obsession for reliability
- Promote contextual clarity
- Foster reconfigurability
- Instill accountability
- Facilitate development
- Encourage security

Reliability-oriented employee behaviors
- Diligence
- Facileness
- Fluidity
- Generativeness

Organizational reliability
Repeatedly produce collective outcomes that meet or exceed minimal quality expectations

Trying conditions
- Complexity
- Interdependence
- External volatility
High Reliability Principles

Five Principles

• **Anticipation**
  – Preoccupation with Failure
  – Reluctance to Simplify
  – Sensitivity to Operations

• **Containment**
  – Commitment to Resilience
  – Deference to Expertise
HRO Principle #1

**Preoccupation with Failure**

- Treat any lapse as a symptom that something may be wrong
HRO Principle #2

Reluctance to Simplify

• Positioned to see as much as possible
• Welcome diverse experience, skepticism
• Recognition is a source of concern
HRO Principle #3

**Sensitivity to Operations**

- Attentive to front line operations
- Big picture is situational not strategic
- Sensitivity to relationships
Anticipation Summary

• HRO’s persuade all members to be chronically concerned about the unexpected and sensitive to the fact that in the face of the potential for surprise, any decision or action may be subject to faulty assumptions or errors in analysis.

• HRO’s work to create a climate where people feel safe to question assumptions and to report problems or failures candidly.

• They help people expand the number of undesired consequences they envision so that they can expand the number or precautions they will take.

• HRO’s create a climate where people feel wary of success, suspicious of quiet periods, and concerned about stability, routinization, and lack of challenge and variety that can predispose their organization to relax vigilance and sink into complacency that can lead to carelessness and error.
Anticipation Summary

• HRO’s counteract tendencies to simplify assumptions, expectations, and analyses through practices such as adversarial reviews, selection of employees with non-typical prior experience, frequent job rotation, and retraining.

• HRO’s work to create a climate that encourages variety in people’s analyses of the organization’s technology and production processes and establish practices that allow those perspectives to be heard and to surface information not held in common. They also train people to manage these differences.

• HRO’s pay serious attention to operations, the front line, and imperfections in these features. They set in place operating practices that help people develop a collective map of operations at any given moment.
HRO Principle #4

Commitment to Resilience

• Errors are inevitable
• Mindful about errors, correct them before they worsen
• Ability to preserve functioning, ability to recover, ability to grow
• Antifragility
• Interdependent team with varied experience
• Assume they will be surprised
HRO Principle #5

Deference to Expertise

• The first to know tend to be lower in rank
• Decisions are pushed down to lowest levels
• Expertise not always matched to hierarchical position
• Deference to expertise rather than experts
Containment Summary

• HRO’s pay just as much attention to building capabilities to cope with error that have occurred as to improving capabilities to plan and anticipate events before they occur.

• HRO’s develop capabilities for mindfulness, swift learning, flexible role structures, and quick size-ups
Containment Summary

• HRO’s adopt an organizationwide mind-set of cure as well as prevention. This means that people are attentive to knowledge and resources that relieve, lighten, moderate, reduce, and decrease surprises. People are willing to begin treating an anomaly even before they have made a full diagnosis. They do so in the belief that this action will enable them to gain experience and a clearer picture of what they are treating. Unlike anticipation, which encourages people to think and then act, resilience encourages people to act while thinking or to act in order to think more clearly. A commander tries different tactics to learn what the enemy can do. This is empirical fighting. It is reactive. It is supposed to be.
Containment Summary

• HRO’s encourage people to make knowledge about the system transparent and widely known. The more people know about the weaknesses of their system and how to manage them, the faster they can notice and correct problems in the making.

• HRO’s establish pockets of resilience through uncommitted resources such as informal networks of people who come together on an as needed basis to solve tricky problems.

• HRO’s create a set of operating dynamics that shifts leadership to the people who currently seem more likely to have an answer to the problem at hand.
High Reliability Behaviors

- **Diligence**
  - Ascertain
  - Communicate

- **Facileness**
  - Initiate
  - Deploy

- **Fluidity**
  - Coact
  - Improvise

- **Generativeness**
  - Learn
  - Educate
Reliability-Enhancing Human Resource Strategy

1. Embed an obsession for reliability
2. Promote contextual clarity
3. Foster reconfigurability
4. Instill accountability
5. Facilitate development
6. Encourage security
UNCONVENTIONAL ICS
Traditional ICS
Unconventional ICS

• Pre-identified pool of profiles
• 5-6 profiles assembled to order
• Composition
  – Political leaders
  – Civil society
  – Red team

Rapid Strategy Cell

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red Team</th>
<th>Political Leadership</th>
<th>Sociologists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

82
ICS with Rapid Strategy Cell

- Incident Commander
  - Rapid Strategy Cell
  - Public Information Officer
  - Liaison Officer
  - Safety Officer

- Operations Section Chief
- Planning Section Chief
- Logistics Section Chief
- Finance/Admin Section Chief
ICS with Rapid Strategy Cell

- Incident Commander
  - Public Information Officer
  - Liaison Officer
  - Safety Officer

- Operations Section Chief
- Planning Section Chief
- Logistics Section Chief
- Finance/Admin Section Chief

Rapid Strategy Cell
ICS with Rapid Strategy Cell

Rapid Strategy Cell

- Incident Commander
  - Public Information Officer
  - Liaison Officer
  - Safety Officer

- Operations Section Chief
- Planning Section Chief
- Logistics Section Chief
- Finance/Admin Section Chief
UNCONVENTIONAL
LEADERSHIP
Unconventional Leadership

• Organizations have developed some very impressive managerial architectures and processes...that will fail.
• Unique leaders must be selected, prepared enabled.
Unconventional Leadership

• The thought of unthinkable events do not negate the relevance of leadership, instead it makes it more important.
• Unconventional leadership should prepare for “de facto’ leaders
• Enable risk taking at ground level, delegate authority, “The Spider and the Starfish”
• Planning should consider the risks to to “pre-crisis” leadership
The Problem with Leadership Culture

• “Entrepreneurial thinkers” have identified the challenge but we still lack “venture capitalists”
• Lack of conviction, lack of imagination
• Education of leaders for unconventional crises
Unconventional Training

• To avoid stun effects, create a capacity for leaders to thrive in a chaotic universe
• Unique training formats
• If an exercise goes smoothly it’s not useful
• Scenarios cannot be questioned
• Group participants
• FEMA has awakened
• Train for resource based planning as opposed to behavioral planning
• AAR that include “everyone”
Unconventional Training

• If government or private sector officials are just going along for the ride or remain cynical or unconvinced then training will not improve performance.

• Overcoming mental blocks
  – Maintain privacy during training
  – Focus on next generation of leaders
  – Identify and clear organizational pressures to free up the individual

• Public expectation for political preparedness

• Identify the value added to operations
Unconventional Leadership Skills

• Generational efforts
• Skills guidance
• It is possible to prepare for the unconventional
New Criteria for Selection Of Leaders

• Problems with educational patterns;
• Problems with patterns of promotion within organizations
The Way Forward

**Five main strategic frameworks**

- Improve the make-up of our response systems
- Modify our social contracts
- Improve the underlying logic and goals of planning efforts
- Improve the mechanism and philosophy of crisis management
- Improve the generational transmission of knowledge and culture through the education of future leaders
Building Resiliency

• Build response mechanisms into normal systems
• Fall back positions
• Dual roles for employees
A New Social Contract

• Increasing need for private-sector response participation
• More effective partnership
• Co-author response plans
• Involve the general public
Resource Based Planning

• Behavioral Planning – planning that focuses on pre-set course of action to follow in specific circumstances.
• Compunds the “stun effect”
• Dependent on a “behavioral chain”
• Dependent on pre-incident rationality
• Use pre-conceived scenarios as a starting point
Rapid Strategy Cell

- “Artists and doers”
- Horizon scanning
- Red Teaming
- Social consequences
- Political consequences
Unconventional Leadership

• Leaders do not have all the answers, right away
• Leaders should not rush to answers first but figure out what the good questions are
• Leaders must believe in the threat of the unconventional
• Learning institutions must believe in the threat of the unconventional
QUESTIONS?