

LESSONS LEARNED: DOMESTIC EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS EXERCISE

EVALUATION CRITERIA: STRATEGIC VS TACTICAL APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT:

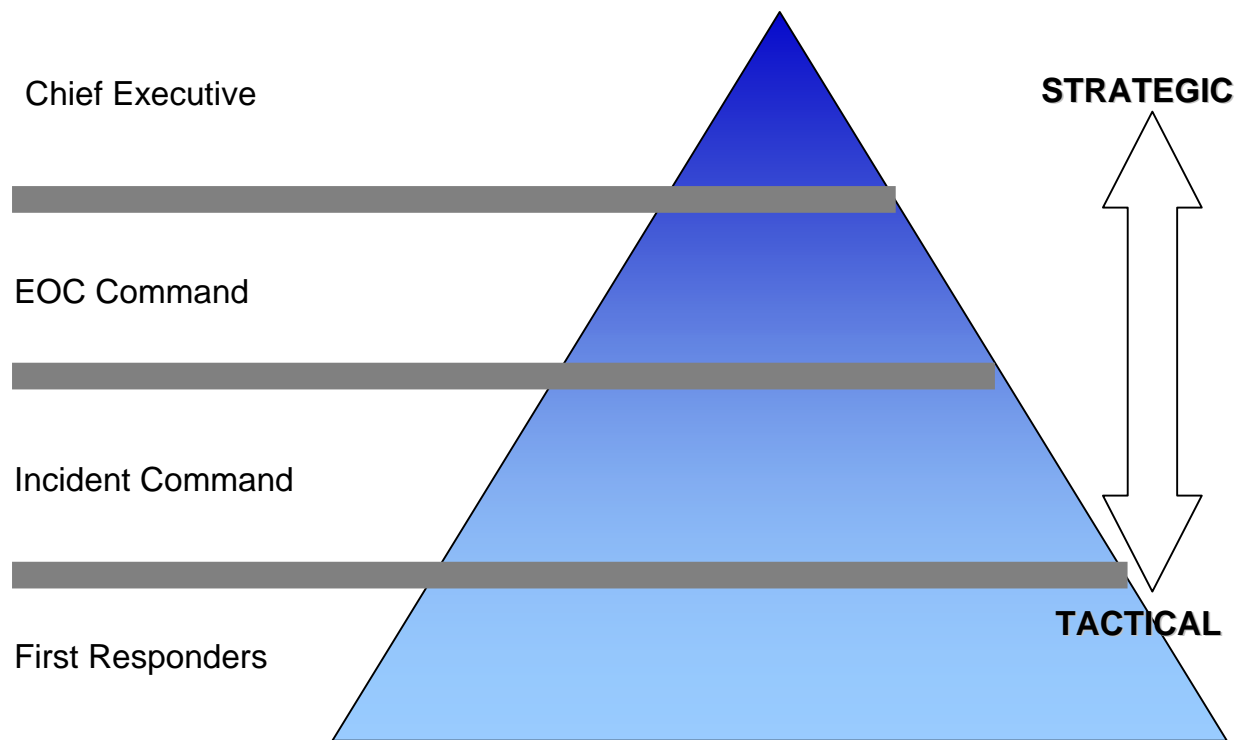
Domestic emergency preparedness incorporates a wide range of emergency services agencies at the federal, state, local and non-governmental levels. Emergency preparedness exercises are vital tools in developing, strengthening and improving application-based response cohesion throughout all levels of the emergency services community. In order for emergency preparedness exercises to be optimally effective, the exercise outcomes must be evaluated against pre-determined objectives at the appropriate level of exercise design. Levels of exercise design should differentiate between strategic and tactical objectives, which directly link to outcome evaluation criterion. Application of existing exercise evaluation criteria models, such as the Homeland Security Exercise Evaluation Program (HSEEP), must be scrutinized for application at the appropriate strategic or tactical levels in accordance with the intended exercise design. This paper and corresponding presentation will discuss lessons learned in applying HSEEP evaluation criteria to the appropriate level of exercise design as determined from exercise experiences of the U.S. Marshals Service (DOJ/USMS) and Federal Protective Service (DHS/FPS) in leveraging the U.S. Army, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Janis system through the Emergency Preparedness Incident Command Simulation (EPiCS™) of Applied Systems Technology, Inc. (AST). Determining the appropriate level of emergency response to be exercised is at the core of exercise design. The exercise typology and design sets the parameters for establishing the organizational and staff level of exercise participants and evaluation criteria, as specified in stated objectives at the desired level.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS EXERCISE TYPOLOGIES:

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) identified various typologies for classifying emergency preparedness exercises. Using governmental base criteria, ODP has defined exercises as Top Official (TOPOFF) exercises, Nationally Significant Special Event (NSSE) exercises as well as federal, state and local exercises.¹ Applying exercise design structure criteria, the ODP has identified exercises as seminars, workshops, tabletops, games, drills, functional exercises (FX), and full-scale exercises (FSX).² For these exercise typologies, the objectives become harder to measure against outcomes the higher up the governmental hierarchy of participation. Standardized exercise evaluation criteria correlate to the exercise typology, but principally evaluating measurable criteria. In general, neither the governmentally based criteria nor the design structure criteria clearly differentiate between strategic or tactical levels of exercise. TOPOFF exercises are designed for senior officials at all levels of government up to and often including the Chief Executives in federal and state governments.

DOMESTIC EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS RESPONSE LEVELS:

The majority of domestic emergency preparedness exercises are geared toward the community of first responders across functional disciplines. Until post-9/11, this first responder community was often sharply segregated between functional disciplines and governmental levels. For example, until 2001, both the local fire service and health care communities were the principal functional disciplines at any governmental level engaged in recurrent operations-based exercises. The police service community has recently become a more frequent player in operations-based and discussion-based exercises. There remain gaps in the broader arena of emergency service disciplines involved in frequent discussion-based and operations-based exercises. These disciplines include, but are not limited to, senior leadership across public service areas at all levels of government as well as non-governmental organizations. Exercising governmental emergency operations centers (EOCs) in which the senior executive leadership and functional-specific public service component leadership (i.e. public works) are at play is vital to closing the gap between governmental decision-making levels. However, there is a marked lack of available exercise evaluation criterion focused decision support at the senior levels of government to effectively measure decision outcomes. The following diagram depicts the concept of hierarchal governmental layers with progressive strategic and tactical decision making overlay.



A prime example of this observation is found in the TOPOFF exercise initiatives. These series of exercises, four in total to date, are designed to test and improve emergency preparedness, response and consequence management at the very top levels of federal, state and international governments. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell stated regarding TOPOFF 2, “[this exercise] embodies the spirit of interagency and international cooperation that surfaced in the aftermath of September 11th. It is this cooperation that will help defeat terrorism worldwide.”³ The Canadian Deputy Prime Minister, John Manley stated, “TOPOFF 2 is an excellent opportunity to collaborate with our American partners, test our response plans and further

enhance our joint response capabilities.”⁴ These quotes reflect the high strategic level of focus for the TOPOFF exercise design. However, the TOPOFF 2 exercise decision support measurement appears not to reflect the various hierarchical levels of government at play. The TOPOFF exercises provide for various levels of exercise design typologies to include full scale, “boots-on-the-ground” activities. The lessons learned from TOPOFF exercises reflect measurements of decision-making at the tactical level.⁵

EVALUATING EXERCISES AT THE RIGHT DECISION MAKING LEVEL:

In designing an exercise within any of the operational-base or discussion-base typologies, the objectives and evaluation criteria must be tailored to the correct level of decision-making responsibility of the participants. Participants from all disciplines and governmental levels (local, state, federal and international) must be exercised at their appropriate level of responsibility.

Exercises designed for senior governmental officials should provide for objectives and outcome decision measurement criteria that involve like-level results, such as political fallout, economic and social impact of various all hazards situational scenarios. The farther down the governmental hierarchy the less the participants should be measured against the broader consequential impact of the scenario. This point is well illustrated in the after action report from the 2004 European exercise entitled *Black Dawn* which targeted senior governmental officials from the European Council, the European Commission, NATO, and various member states.⁶ *Black Dawn* focused by objective and measured outcome on European governmental and institutional capabilities in preventing terrorist acquisition and use of weapons of mass destruction. This decision-making level in the *Black Dawn* exercise would not have been conducive to more tactically oriented levels.

During computer simulation exercises hosted by the DOJ/USMS in 2002 and the DHS/FPS in 2004 utilizing the EPiCs technology, the target participant levels were inclusive of tactical commanders from state, local and federal civilian and military governmental agencies. Disciplines represented included police, fire and emergency medical services. Additionally, in these exercises the local government’s EOCs were engaged. The EOCs include local political leaders as well as various public service leaders such as public works and transportation. There was little differentiation made in the objectives and decision-making evaluation criteria between the two levels of participants. In the DOJ/USMS exercise, in Alexandria, Virginia, the city’s EOC participants felt disengaged from the more intense tactical decision-making processes that were occurring at the incident command level. This resulted in a breakdown of information flow and integration between the EOC and the field incident command. Similarly, in the simulation of a terrorist attack scenario on a federal facility hosted by the DHS/FPS, the Prince Georges County (MD) EOC shared similar impressions of being “left out.” These lessons learned are quite common as demonstrated in various exercise and real world after action reports across the country.⁷

The disconnection between tactical incident command and the first responders has long been an element of post-exercise and post-incident lessons learned. The FIRESCOPE project of the 1970s, which led to the development of the Incident Command System (ICS), was congressionally commissioned to study these issues.⁸ The ICS, presently incorporated in the DHS National Incident Management System (NIMS), details procedures and methods for isolating and effectively integrating critical incident decision making processes between functional disciplines and governmental levels. Despite these advancements in critical incident

response over the past 30 years, the measurement of focused decision-making within functional discipline and at the appropriate level of responsibility remains not clearly defined.

CONCLUSION:

Domestic emergency preparedness exercises as well as real-world events, such as the collective Hurricane Katrina response, clearly demonstrate that the all-hazards response community needs to improve their respective abilities to make decisions within their areas of functional, statutory and governmental responsibility. Also, they need to improve the ability to integrate the decision making process between strategic and tactical levels, as appropriate. The modeling of exercise objectives, design and subsequent evaluation criteria should be re-examined to strengthen and critique outcomes that foster a decision support system that targets the correct levels of incident management. The HSEEP is a significant leap forward in standardizing exercise evaluation criteria; however more work is needed to develop and standardize decision evaluation criteria that are refined to the appropriate strata of decision responsibility. Just as the ICS structure follows a military tactical command structure, civilian domestic emergency preparedness decision support systems should leverage the military cultural discipline for hierarchal decision-making. Likewise, the military exercise and decision making evaluation systems should be leveraged into the civilian arena of all-hazards emergency preparedness and consequence management.

¹ ODP, HSEEP, March 2003, Volume I, Chapter 1, pgs 7-8.

² ODP, HSEEP, March 2003, Volume I, Chapter 3, pgs 19-22.

³ "TOPOFF 2 – Week-Long National Combating Terrorism Exercise Begins May 12, 2003," DHS Press Release issued May 5, 2003.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ U.S. National Response Team, "TOPOFF 2 National Response Team Lessons Learned Report After Action Review: Issues, Discussions and Recommendations," undated.

⁶ "Black Dawn: Scenario-Based Exercise," Brussels, Belgium, CSIS dated May 3, 2004.

⁷ The U.S. National Response Team after action review cited above describes inter-EOC lack of connectivity as a impediment to response effectiveness.

⁸ Heide, Auf der, Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination, Chapter 7, date unknown.