ITEC 2019 – 'Training the Crisis in Crisis Management'

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Abstract — This paper will discuss how we can train the crisis in crisis management. We will use the exercise Unified Response as a real example of this. The exercise was a large scale and complex, live and command post exercise, which was held between 29 February 2016 and 3 March 2016. The exercise involved all of London's emergency response organisations, including local and national authorities, along with specialised teams from across the UK supported by units from Hungary, Italy and Cyprus activated through the European Union Emergency Response Coordination Centre. The exercise was conducted simultaneously at four separate venues in central and southeast London, as well as at a disused power station located near the Dartford river crossing. The scenario was based on a significant building collapse, incorporating heavy transport and mass casualties.

1 Introduction

With the growth of social media and the complexity of business operations, a major incident or crisis can affect and disrupt any business. Effective Incident and Crisis Management (ICM) relies upon the right people being equipped with the right skills and tools to deliver a response at the right time.

At 4C Strategies, we work with a number of public and private sector clients to develop and test their crisis management capabilities. Our solutions include current state audit of ICM capability, development of ICM maturity model and metrics, design of ICM plans, processes and tools, training courses, desktop and simulation exercises and real-time incident or crisis support.

2 Approach

The UK Emergency Response sector has seen a growing requirement for effective multi-agency collaborative contingency planning and response measures in the event of disruptive and hazardous incidents. The expectation for a unified emergency response has called for cohesive, integrated, well-resourced and, where necessary, specialist procedures. In order to exercise, verify and analyse these plans, the London Resilience Partnership was tasked with running London's largest multi-agency disaster training exercise as part of the European Commission Exercise Program.

Exercise Unified Response (EUR) was designed to test the activation and efficacy of the EU Community Mechanism to facilitate the provision of mutual aid to the UK from EU member states in the event of a major emergency incident in the capital. The London Resilience Partnership was tasked with simulating the humanitarian, infrastructural and wider economic impacts of a major transport-related incident affecting central London. In the event that the UK's emergency response and recovery resources were insufficient to manage such a major disaster, a request for support from EU member states would be made through the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) in Brussels.

Major subsurface construction projects, such as the extensive infrastructure currently under development for the Cross rail initiatives, upgrades to the London Underground and substantial high-rise construction projects are underway across London. Previous incidents in the capital have highlighted the risks posed by ongoing city construction and the potential challenges created for emergency services – particularly from an urban search and rescue perspective. As a result, the exercise scenario simulated a large building collapse onto a central tube station, involving heavy transport, mass casualties, thousands of tonnes of rubble and hundreds of emergency responders. An impressive live site was designed to test and improve rescue and civil protection measures in underground facilities

3 Discussion

What are the key requirements in order to successfully deliver a large scale exercise like Exercise Unified Response? And what could we learn from it for future training opportunities? Looking back to EUR as a learning experience we would like to present and the discuss a number of different aspects. Our take is that a key ingredient for success in an exercise of this scale was the provision of a realistic scenario and a large amount of role

players. In order to provide a true learning experience and simulating complex co-ordination requirements across over 80 participating agencies, the exercise planning phase was a key element. Exercise Unified Response also tried to tap into previous exercise experiences in order to learn from good practice. Clear focus on exercise and training objectives and making sure that all the participants had a common understanding of these objectives as a true driving force for the exercise, was one of fundamental building blocks. Another building block was the fact that the exercise scenario had components focusing on previous very challenging real life situations as mass casualties, disaster victim identification and that real life resources (ie a large number of role players) were brought into the exercise in order to give training audience an opportunity to train as if this was happening for real.

An integrated approach to exercise design and delivery was also vital to the success of the exercise in order to make sure that all the participating agencies from the EU level, to national level to main London city command centre got a good training experience.

The facilitation of vital information sharing between the UK and participating nations (i.e. missing persons, victims, and public health advice for those involved in the disaster) was also an important dimension for the training audience to tackle. It is truly important that the learning dimension in this kind of exercise also has an external perspective, ie how to identify and track lessons? But also how to make sure that the feedback is given to the training audience in a systematic and professional way.

EUR required a sophisticated system linking exercise management functions, for the multiple command centres, for exercise delivery (automated injects and resourcing) and allowing for detailed exercise evaluation.

Exonaut® provided by 4C Strategies was selected to provide an integrated management platform to enable i) structured and efficient exercise planning, ii) dynamic and flexible delivery at both a live site and multiple command centres and iii) real-time evidence-based assessments and evaluations, irrespective of location.

Design of the exercise

A detailed design and complex stakeholder planning was required for an exercise of this scale. Exercise control scheduled and actively managed over 1800 scenario injects by allocating incidents within the exercise directly to the exercise and training objectives of the participating agencies. This enabled ongoing analysis and efficient evaluation of the data with a full supporting evidence chain. Observers and mentors were present at all the exercise sites to record observations tagging them to exercise objectives and thereby enabling a systematic follow up. All the training objectives were assessed and the outcome were turned in to post exercise reports.

Simulated media

If a major transport disaster occurs in London, there will be significant expectations and pressures placed on the Communications Teams of a wide range of public and private sector organisations. In order to provide exercise participants with an opportunity to be fully immersed in a realistic training event and to challenge communications representatives from the 80 participating agencies, exercise control was requested to deliver a range of simulated media materials to support exercise delivery. These included: i) Audio/Visual media news clips filmed and edited in real-time by Media Team throughout the exercise, broadcast as fictitious news broadcasts; ii) a Chirpy™ platform, a simulation tool replicating Twitter functionality, which enabled participants to monitor ongoing social media response and publish their own "Chirps" to respond via social media to the ongoing incident.

4 Conclusion:

EUR was designed to test and validate current arrangements for integrating assistance from specialist teams – such as those responsible for Urban Search and Rescue – based in the UK and from other countries in the European Union. A lot of efforts were put into the planning and delivery of the exercise in order to achieve the overall aim.

The 1500 + observations captured by the exercise staff in Exonaut® enabled that validation to take place in systematic and evidence based way. From strategic command level on an EU wide scale, down to the participating emergency services and local authorities on the ground, each process executed during EUR now has unprecedented levels of evaluative data documenting and verifying capability and, importantly, identifying the training gaps and risks in current contingency plans for continual improvements in the EU Emergency Response procedure.

Given its status as the largest civilian exercise in UK history, the exercise attracted a large amount of press attention and public interest. The London Resilience Partnership were successful in using EUR to promote London as a prepared, resilient and leading global city, capable of bringing public and private agencies together. The exercise demonstrated rigorous practice and rehearsal of integral emergency response plans that will be engaged in the event of a major incident.

The exercise also provided the London Resilience Partnership with the opportunity to leverage innovative methodology and innovation to deliver a "best in class" approach to exercise delivery, reinforcing the UK's position as world leaders in resilience management.