Appendix C: Leadership and Team Dynamics

U.S. Fire Administration (USFA)
Type 3 All-Hazards Incident Management Team
(AHIMT) Introduction

Acknowledgements

The IMT
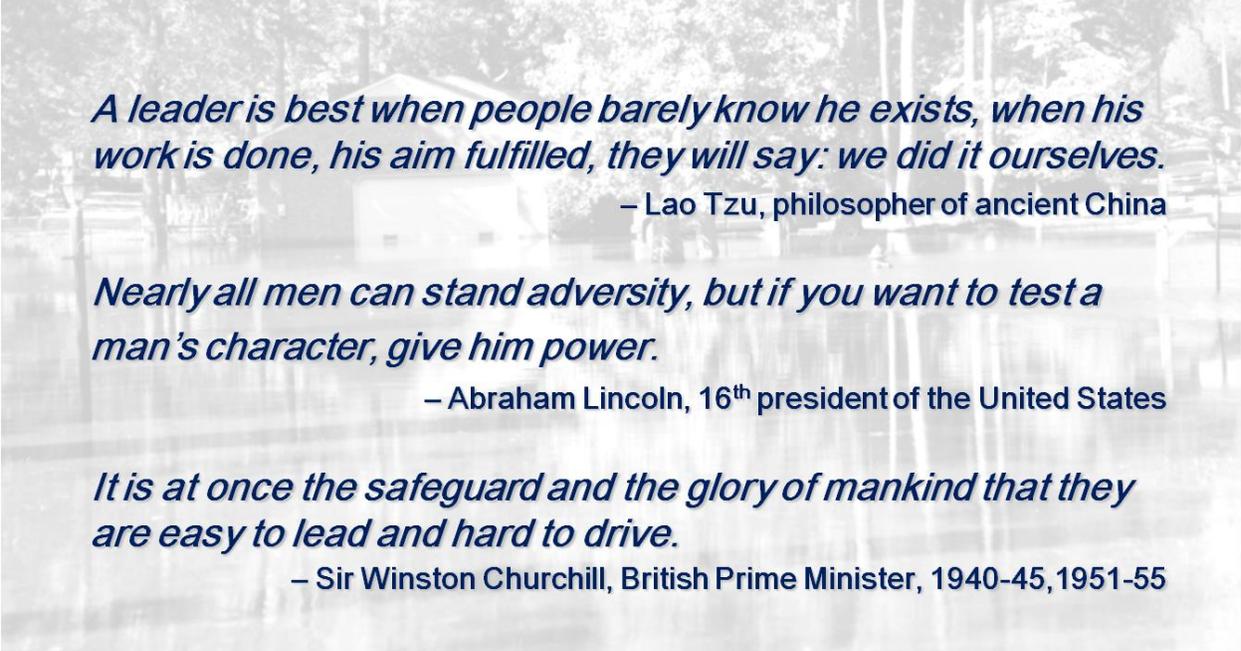
A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.

– Lao Tzu, philosopher of ancient China

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.

– Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the United States

It is at once the safeguard and the glory of mankind that they are easy to lead and hard to drive.

– Sir Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, 1940-45, 1951-55

Ordinarily, emergency incidents are managed by local agencies or organizations, such as law enforcement or fire service agencies. However, when situations escalate, exceeding ordinary capabilities and requiring significant additional resources and operational support, Incident Management Teams (IMTs) answer the call to serve.

IMTs augment the reach of ordinary response organizations, providing the organization and structure to bring in the right people and resources to accomplish the mission. They step in to continue the efforts already set in motion by first responders or another incident organization. In this regard, IMTs are service organizations, serving the incident effort and the public.

IMTs operate in an environment filled with challenges—the necessity of working on an assembled team, a driving sense of urgency, imprecise situation awareness, missing or conflicting information, complex problems, intense pressure to make good decisions. However, in spite of these obstacles, the need for success—and the costs of failure—are great.

For IMTs, success is defined as being able to build enough synergy to accomplish the mission with an assembled team in an indeterminate environment filled with complex issues and problems. IMT members are faced with the necessity of making collective judgments and directing action despite all the intrinsic difficulties and constraints. The key to success is taking deliberate steps to build cohesion, adaptability, and resilience among those who serve on the IMT.

The initiative to build an effective IMT is not academic or mechanical but inherently human. Human beings have the unique ability to make sense from fragmented pieces of information and develop a story to explain a set of events. People can construct a narrative—about what has happened, its cause, likely effects—relatively quickly and accurately. This sense-making represents a powerful and critical capability that cannot be duplicated by non-human systems.

Human Behavior

- Conscious Mind
- Unconscious Mind
- Experience

Human beings are also equipped with the capability of making judgments and applying reason. A pocket calculator can compute a complicated equation, but only a human being can make judgments about the result of the equation. Too much, too little, right, wrong, effective, dangerous—these are judgments, and making judgments is solely within the realm of human ability.

Offering assessments, deriving meaning, connecting the dots, clarifying nuances—these singularly human abilities are central to effective incident response. How well individuals integrate judgment and direct decision capacity defines IMT success.

At its core, team synergy and functionality involves connecting with people—influencing, directing, mentoring, and motivating human beings. Interacting with others offers an opportunity to project credibility and strengthen cohesion; interacting well requires insight into what motivates or inhibits people.

Understanding human behavior is a fundamental component of team dynamics, and a starting point for understanding behavior is recognizing the importance of both the conscious and subconscious.

- The **conscious mind** is supported by the cognitive memory system, which provides order and sense to memory. Based in the hippocampus, the cognitive system logically organizes complex memories into abstract structures. It is well integrated with other parts of the brain but largely detached from emotions.
- The **subconscious mind** is supported by the emotion-fear memory system, which records memory in the amygdala, a more primitive part of the brain. These memories comprise fragmented, non-integrated, and seemingly illogical memory connections. The cognitive system helps to make sense of these memories by placing them in context, but when circumstances exceed the ability of the conscious mind to respond, the subconscious can bypass it and react much more directly and quickly.

The conscious and subconscious can be likened to an iceberg with the portion above the waterline representing cognitive memories and the portion below the waterline representing the emotion-fear memories. Leaders influence people by interacting with people both above and below the waterline, recognizing that emotion is the chemical glue that bonds experience to memory.

Examples of conscious and unconscious memories:

- Have you ever tried to talk someone out of being afraid of spiders?
- Compare memories of the drive to work last week with where they were on 9/11.
- Understanding the college bowl system.

The Anatomy of an Effective Team

Team result

Peer accountability

Commitment

Healthy conflict

Trust

Communication

"The source of this graphic is The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable by Patrick Lencioni."

In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable,*[1] Patrick Lencioni identifies what it takes for a team to reach a level of high performance. This pyramid was adapted from a similar pyramid developed by Lencioni, but it is a bit different. It'd be more accurate to say that it was "inspired by" or "developed from" Lencioni's.

Cohesive, adaptive, resilient—these describe characteristics of an effective team; they also reflect the progression of team maturity. In other words, a team must be cohesive before it can progress to being adaptive or resilient. When forming or activating an IMT, the first focus is on promoting team cohesion.

Cohesive teams coordinate action to accomplish the mission, focusing behavior toward the common purpose. The ultimate goal of achieving synergy is possible only when a team acts in concert with concentric thinking and a common frame of reference.

Lencioni offers an illustration describing behavior that builds team cohesion and ultimately creates synergy. When fundamental team behavior is dysfunctional, it is almost impossible for the team to be effective at higher levels. The pyramid (adapted from the one developed by Lencioni) illustrates the building blocks of team synergy.

Communication

Communication has been added to the base of the pyramid.

Effective communication is the foundation for building trust. The team must establish an environment that is conducive to effective communication.

Team members need to be allowed to communicate observations, issues, and fears.

---

[1] Patrick Lencioni. *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable*. Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Trust

Teams begin when two or more individuals come together with a similar desire to pursue a shared purpose and judge that working together better fulfills the common end state than working separately. The amount of trust generated depends on a number of variables: judgments about how much others share this similar desire, perceptions of how well others are able to contribute to achieving the common end state, and an assessment of whether others have trustworthy character and can deliver on what they promise.

In Lencioni's construct, trust is the foundation of an effective team. However, communication is the first and most critical requirement for building an effective team, for a team that does not practice open communication has little chance of fostering trust. Building situational awareness, for example, requires communication. Making sound decisions as well as carrying them out requires communication.

The underlying axiom can be summed up in this statement: *Communication builds trust, and trust builds cohesion.*

Trust can be thought of as a measurement of predictability. The amount of confidence in predicting another's behavior is one measure of how trustworthy that person seems. Trust increases when people and systems behave in predictable ways. On an IMT, the more quickly and effectively a team can establish trust, the more quickly it can become cohesive and effective.

A key challenge is that on many incidents, the teams form very quickly, making it much more difficult to build trust.

Healthy Conflict

In building situational awareness and contributing to sound decisions, team members have different perspectives and valuable expertise, whether they be public information, logistics, or any of the other functions on an IMT. Communicating these perspectives may lead to conflict, especially in teams such as IMTs that are trying to become effective quickly in a dynamic situation.

Healthy conflict requires focusing on the *what* rather than the *who.* That is, *what* accomplishes the mission or serves the common good rather than *who* is involved. Trust enables a team to engage in healthy conflict and build cohesion rather than devolving into *ad hominem* conflict that divides. Team members are more willing to engage in constructive debate providing insight and judgment when they know others on the team listen to them and take their suggestions and arguments seriously. A foundation of trust encourages team members contribute their insights and judgments, when appropriate.

The different functions of an IMT have different perspectives and will inevitably have differences in judgment about what is best.

Commitment

Leaders build commitment within teams by actively soliciting ideas and perspective. Team members develop ownership in decisions when they have a say and know they helped shape the outcome. Even if their suggestions are rejected, people are more willing to commit to a group's decision when their concerns and suggestions have been given a respectful hearing. Although the leader is ultimately responsible for team decisions, each team member commits to the final team decision as if it were their own. Involvement equals commitment.

Peer Accountability

As members of a team, individuals are responsible for their actions. Performance—whether good or bad—is seen and judged. Actions produce results that can be effective or ineffective. Constructive peer accountability means that team members trust that other team members provide feedback about performance with the best interest of the team—and the individual—in mind.

More than any system of reward and discipline, more than any policy, the fear of letting down team mates motivates people to improve their performance. Open systems of tracking and reporting, such as those in ICS, can facilitate mutual support and peer accountability among team members by communicating commitments and timelines. ICS provides many means to maintain accountability.

Team Result

When team members understand what ought to be done and hold each other accountable for doing it, they are each able and willing to align their decisions with and apply their individual initiative to achieving the team's purpose, or team result. This alignment of initiative optimizes the team's cohesion, adaptability, and resilience because individuals apply their own perspective, knowledge, expertise, and judgment to working with each other to achieve a common purpose. Thus, the team better achieves its common purpose than if they were acting separately because of the mutual support and interaction of individual members. For an IMT, the team result is the assignment contained in the delegation of authority.

Mission-Driven Culture

Sharing a common culture underpins the development of an effective team. The term *culture* is defined as the set of attitudes, values, goals, and practices that are shared by a group of people, such as in an institution or organization.

For example, among emergency responders, service to the public is a commonly-held value and a core component of the operational culture shared by responders worldwide. IMTs are also comprised of people who similarly value public service. Similar, however, does not mean identical.

Although a general motivation to serve is universal among IMT members, the individual way that people express this value is influenced by past experience, the values of their parent organization, and individual bias. Although the value sets may be generally aligned, habits and attitudes about the right way to serve can vary widely.

In a team comprised of people from a range of resource types and agencies, people bring with them a cultural overlay from their own organizations that defines expectations about the way teams work together. For example, when a situation escalates and becomes increasingly risky, those who specialize in HAZMAT may tend to slow down to make sure they have a clear understanding of the emerging risks. The same situation may compel those in law enforcement to speed up to make sure the threat does not get worse.

The difference underscores the difficulty of building common culture and principles of action for an IMT. Seemingly small differences can generate significant friction and dysfunction within the team, often inhibiting concentric effort and action.

Building a Mission-Driven Culture

Given sufficient time and exposure, team members normalize values and behavior with each other. (A process sometimes referred to as the Forming and Storming phases of team building.) However, the result of such a process can be inconsistent and unacceptably slow, particularly when given the public's expectations of IMTs. This situation presents a dilemma for IMTs—even though the team is often assembled ad hoc or comprised of members who work together only infrequently, the public expectation them to function effectively from the onset.

As organizations struggle to improve their performance, academics and management consultants have proposed numerous descriptions of successful operational cultures in the hope that they can be emulated or replicated. Unfortunately, most of these models have not extended far beyond describing the behavior of people in the culture, rather than the underlying value structure that drives the desired behavior.

Within incident management, common operational culture or the shared value system is not doctrinally defined. The culture that permeates the incident organization is generally aligned, though not well enough to gain concentric behavior in all areas. Therefore, understanding the values comprising the heart of a culture and aligning with them is critical to accomplishing a mission. A mission-driven culture is derived from the core operational values of many organizations that function in ambiguous situations. These values underpin operational behavior throughout incident organizations and apply to every level—from political to tactical.

ICS is a system. The team of people who implement it function within a culture, and it is this culture and its norms that determine how well the system operates.

Values of the Mission-Driven Culture

The values of the Mission-Driven Culture form the foundation for the behavior and actions of those in incident organizations. Inherently interconnected, these values build upon and reinforce one another and collectively form the basis of a cohesive, adaptive, and resilient operational culture.

These values are a particular formulation of the values shared by IMT members. Their essence could be formulated with different language or maybe as five or seven values, rather than the six described within this document. The goal, therefore, is to articulate values that can be readily acknowledged. While some may differ on the wording of "pursuit of truth," its essence should not be controversial.

In order to demonstrate alignment with the values of the Mission-Driven Culture and ultimately build an effective and functional team, each team member practices behavior that is congruent with these values.

Service for the Common Good

This value serves as the touchstone to the culture, reinforcing the connection between the incident organization and the people it serves. Highlighting the ethic of serving the public, service for the common good emphasizes the need for team members to be focused on the aggregate team result and its benefit to the greater good. This value reinforces the need for everyone in the incident organization to strive to maintain perspective of the larger context for the incident.

High-Trust State

Team member's confidence that fellow team members also value service to the common good enables and promotes synergistic action—providing for the speed, certainty, anticipation, and proactive posture necessary for effective incident action. Commitment to a high-trust state and its associated expectations promotes resilience, including error detection and correction, robust discussion, and the ability to challenge team dysfunction and hold one other accountable without fear.

A way to conceptualize the broad requirements of the high-trust state is to look at what happens if any aspects are NOT present. When people believe that others do not know their jobs or are here to serve self rather than others, the resulting second-guesses and work-arounds are the direct opposites of concentric action. When people believe that ICS is a stupid, bureaucratic system that doesn't really work, they may freelance and add unpredictably to the system. When people believe that the mission itself is not worth doing, they may not give a wholesale commitment.

Pursuit of Truth

The need to identify the common good in a situation, as well as what ought to be done to accomplish it, compels all team members to acquire the best possible situational awareness and common operating picture.

Form and Function Defined by the End State

With the best possible situational awareness, teams plan and organize themselves to accomplish what ought to be done. To expedite these efforts in dynamic and chaotic environments, organizational systems and processes are established. This value embodies the need for adaptability and versatility to ensure that these systems and plans serve the mission and common good rather than other ends. Willingness to craft new strategies, tactics, and processes to address operational need helps to keep actions linked to the current problem set

and prevents obstacles brought about by prescribed thinking or rigid systems. In the context of an IMT, ICS is a means for solving a problem not a end goal in itself.

Individual Initiative

Individual initiative strengthens resilience in the face of unexpected or emerging issues. A culture promoting individual initiative allows for freedom of action yet simultaneously provides a meaningful boundaries through well-articulated intent.

Continuous Improvement

Those who value service to the common good and a pursuit of truth also value being able to serve better next time. This value reinforces learning and improvement both for the individual and across the organization. For individuals, embracing this value opens the doors to meaningful performance feedback and self-awareness. For organizations, it allows for frank and open discussions about past operational performance to bring focus to future adaptations and progress.

Common Situational Awareness

The Johari Window

A Johari window is a personality inventory and communication tool created by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in 1955 in the United States. Originally designed as a personality and relationship tool, the Johari Window helps to recognize and identify gaps and overlap in how people perceive themselves and others. The tool is useful both in conceptualizing self-development needs as well as in understanding the challenges of developing cohesion in teams. Only after taking a honest look within can people focus on maximizing their strengths and working to augment weak areas.

As illustrated by Ingram and Luft's model, perceptions about self are divided into four areas. Each of these quadrants shows a different perspective:

■ Arena—The you known by others and yourself;

■ Façade—The you known by you but unknown to others;

■ Blind Spot—The you unknown by you but known to others; and

■ Unknown—The you unknown to both others and yourself.

Expanding the Arena

Trustworthiness and credibility increase when people understand and have confidence in another's abilities, mind-set, and credibility. Leaders show willingness to reveal personal qualities, attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses that pertain to accomplishing the mission in order to increase common situational awareness. The processes of exposure and feedback are

meaningful ways of enlarging the arena. As the exposure and feedback increase, the arena expands and the unknowns become smaller.

Exposure

Exposure involves revealing personal information about self, particularly limitations and weaknesses. It builds trust by showing willingness to share information about self and encourages others to do the same.

In a Mission-Driven Culture, exposure of personal traits or attributes that could potentially hinder accomplishing the mission demonstrates a commitment to put the needs of the mission above personal discomfort. However, discretion is important in determining what ought to be shared because exposure about personal attributes that do not have an effect on accomplishing of the mission may be interpreted as a lack of focus on what is important.

Feedback

Similarly, leaders also have a duty to accept, and even solicit, feedback about their behavior as it affects the mission. Feedback helps individuals gauge whether their actions are meeting the mark to accomplish the task; it also increases recognition of how well they are implementing the values of the Mission-Driven Culture. Accepting feedback is the cornerstone of continuous improvement.

Thinking About Exposure and Feedback

Exposure and feedback are particularly important for people who have been leading for a while and who may have become overly confident in their experience. This is related to fear about probing things that are below the waterline. People like to stay inside their comfort zone.

What prevents people from exploring blind spots? A tendency to avoid exploring blind spots also applies collectively to units and organizations. Why?

The Team Arena

The Johari Window also offers a helpful lens for looking at the team arena.

Initially, the collective arena of an IMT is dominated by the structure and trappings of the system—common vocabulary, uniforms and badges, standard operating procedures, credentials, organization charts—all of which provide a structure for expectations. This system usually enhances predictability while decreasing anxiety and stress. Overall, this structure represents *systemic trust.*

Interpersonal trust is gained with experience interacting with team members. The team arena begins with minimal shared information about others as individuals and increases as interactions help fill in the blanks.

Systemic trust allows the incident response to gain momentum. Personal experience strengthens or undermines trust fostered by the system. The goal is to fill the arena with shared experiences that validate and strengthen systemic trust and minimize those experiences that undermine it.

Using the Johari Window

Think of an example from your own experience when feedback from someone else helped you to identify and overcome a blind spot. If possible, recall an incident that had some effect on operational effectiveness, such as a stress reaction.

Credibility

Leadership requires an ability to influence others. The ability to do so, however, largely depends on how others perceive and judge the leader. What makes people do what a leader asks? Why do others listen to a leader's opinion? What causes someone to trust a leader? When a leader says, "*Follow me,*" what persuades them to do so?

The answers depend on their judgments of the leader's credibility. Some ancient philosophers viewed credibility in terms of a person's ability to persuade. In the 4th century BC, Aristotle wrote *Rhetoric*, a treatise on the art of persuasion. He identified three dimensions of *ethos*, which is one person's assessment of another's credibility, the basis for persuasion and influence:

- **Good Will**—Are you working for the right reasons?
- **Practical Wisdom**—Do you know how to do what ought to be done?
- **Virtue**—Do you have the integrity, courage, or other qualities to actually do what ought to be done?

A person's degree of influence is a direct outgrowth of others' trust and confidence in these three qualities. People tend to choose to follow those who demonstrate appropriate motivation, competence, and sound character.

Command Presence

In the context of an incident organization, command presence describes how a leader presents himself or herself to others: the myriad of personal attributes and behaviors that communicate that the leader is credible—worthy of trust and respect. A leader's character is the foundation upon which command presence is built. Other's perception and judgment of character begins the moment people begin interacting. Leaders reveal their character in every interaction, and their character shapes and permeates the command presence they project.

People constantly size up the situation and their leader. Dress, body language, and poise all contribute as the wrapper and medium of the image and message conveyed. And, people are quick to pick up on incongruities between what a leader says and does.

Stress—An Operational Risk

Conceptualizing Stress

From a physiological perspective, stress is an arousal response to some form of stimuli or provocation—the fight or flight response in its primitive form. All animals experience and react to stress. Dogs bite when stressed; cattle lose weight; birds take flight. The response is natural, immediate, and primitive.

Stress is a natural by-product of living. People experience stress on the job, at home, and even in their recreational activities. When people experience too much stress, they cope using strategies often learned in childhood. Some coping strategies help reduce the stress on the spot; some reduce the stress after the fact. These coping strategies are better known as stress reactions. We use them for a simple reason: they work, at least to some degree or in the short term.

Stress is an operational risk. While people may recognize that they are stressed, it is less likely that they recognize the risk and mitigate it. It is assumed that most people are at least familiar with stress, so the purpose is primarily to emphasize that it represents a risk to accomplishing the mission and, therefore, that they have a duty to mitigate it.

Stress Reactions

Stress reactions vary from person to person and are situationally dependent. The following are some common short term reactions to stress:

■ Perspiration;

■ Accelerated heart rate;

■ Freezing up or shutting down;

■ Disordered or confused thinking;

■ Tunnel vision;

■ Higher error rate in work;

■ Procrastination;

■ Lower motivation; and

■ Sleeplessness.

Stress reactions cause problems and pose operational risk. For this reason, stress and stress reactions should be managed, just as other types of risks are managed.

The Effects of Stress Reactions

In the incident environment, stress reactions can cause errors in decision making or cloud judgment; they can inhibit team performance and damage cohesion.

To picture the effects of stress reactions, imagine a pendulum hanging from a string. Unintended agitation occurs at the top of the string when a leader's character or stress reactions affect their ability to clearly articulate their intent and make effective decisions. Vacillation also occurs when the leadership team is not unified or sends out conflicting messages.

The smallest movement at the top of the string causes the pendulum to swing dramatically, affecting the arc and speed of the mass at the bottom. Those at the ground level find themselves trying to keep up and react to the erratic changes in the pendulum's speed and

direction. This confusion creates the perception that the leadership team can't get its act together and contributes to a negative perception of the IMT.

Consistency provides a strong anchor point from which others can key their behaviors. It minimizes the swinging of the pendulum and inspires confidence in the leaders' abilities.

Applying the Johari Window to understand one's own stress reactions is valuable. Recognizing abilities and limitations, seeking feedback, learning from mistakes, knowing where to improve and when to seek out others with complimentary strengths—these are all behaviors crucial to leadership success and directly affect the quality of command presence.

Planning for Stress Exercise

Stress reactions are potential risks to team performance, and thus, to the quality of communication, decisions, and interactions with other team members. Recognizing your stress reactions is the first step to identifying mitigations and maintaining team performance.

Building Awareness

What are your most common stress reactions? Think back to the last time you experienced one of these stress reactions. What conditions or situation triggered it?

Increasing the Arena

In the future, how would others know that you are having this stress reaction? What specific behaviors serve as your indicators?

Planning for Stress

Trigger points are pre-planned responses for predetermined indicators. What trigger points could you set to mitigate the stress reaction and refocus? When others observe this stress reaction (and you may not be aware of it), what would you want them to do? How would you want them to communicate with you to mitigate it?

Team Communication

Effective teams maintain good situation awareness, analyze objectives, make good decisions, convey leader's intent—and all of these depend on the ability to communicate well.

Practices and techniques described in the following sections strengthen the effectiveness of communication and promote accurate, relevant, timely, and complete messages.

Five Communication Responsibilities

Adopted by the wildland fire community at the interagency level, the Five Communications Responsibilities are common doctrine in high-risk environments. All response leaders have a duty to understand and practice these communications skills until they become constant, ingrained habit.

- **Briefing**—As span of control, incident/event complexity, and size increase, clear briefings are the basis for common situation awareness throughout the incident.

- **Debriefing**—After Action Reviews (AARs) are essential for building accountability and promoting healthy conflict. In addition, AARs directly support the value of continuous improvement by providing a platform for lessons learned.

- **Communicate hazards to others**—Hazards can be personal, tactical, situational, political, or organizational. The value *Pursuit of Truth* calls for team members to look out for all types of hazards and communicate them accordingly.

■ **Acknowledge and understand messages**—the practice of restating task assignments and requests helps break error chains before they cause significant damage.

■ **Ask if you don't know**—Leaders guard against false assumptions. In addition, advanced questioning techniques enable leaders to deepen their understanding of situations. The goal is not merely data but a refined product distilled from information: specifically, meaningful and relevant knowledge based on sound reasoning and judgment.

Active Listening Techniques

People with ample experience in emergency response have a wealth of knowledge and insight resulting from experience. Intuition, the ability to grasp a situation quickly, involves recognizing matches between current events and previous ones, recognizing memories of past events that resemble what is now emerging.

Comprehensive understanding requires pairing together the facts along with the context of people's intuition. Active listening provides a means of tapping into a person's perspective and experience, is a way to build situation awareness prior to moving into action, and can be used to clarify intent and ambiguous or poorly planned direction from above.

The spoken word has an associated context in the form of verbal inflection and nonverbal signals. When they are congruent, the strength of the message is stronger. Incongruence may indicate a disconnect between what is said and what is felt. Detecting incongruity may indicate that there is more to the story than indicated by the words spoken. In stressful situations, people may not even be aware of the incongruity. Active listening is effective because it operates below the waterline at the subconscious level, and keeps the door open to the subconscious.

Active listening is needed in the planning process amongst the C&G staff. For example, between an LSC and OSC, or between an FSC and LSC. Another likely situation would be amongst different disciplines, such as law enforcement, public health, fire, etc.

The following active listening techniques promote deeper understanding as well as help clarify meaning in emotionally charged situations.

Encouragement

Listeners give others encouragement both verbally and nonverbally. Shutting out distractions such as radio chatter and focusing attention on the person communicating are ways of encouraging people to communicate.

Decoding

Decoding statements, also called reflective statements, build trust and draw out more information than routine questions about the facts. Reflective statements restate or decode the emotion behind the speaker's statement.

A person who has strong feelings about a subject often imprecisely conveys emotion into language, sometimes pairing a verbal *yes* with a nonverbal *no.* Any inconsistency then has to be decoded by the listener, and then interpreted.

Although emotions are interpreted at some level subconsciously, decoding requires a conscious effort to identify the emotion *and s*ay it out loud for verification.

Restatement

Restatement is way to restate the factual part of the message using one's own words. Simply verifying the facts shows respect for what the person is saying and builds trust.

Restatement is a good way to get a quick map check and reaffirm understanding of the situation. It also keeps the sender engaged and helps calm people down by providing focus.

Inquiry

Inquiries probe the sender's content for more breadth or detail. Open-ended questions force the sender to elaborate or explain, providing more detailed information.

Questions should either confirm or eliminate possibilities. It's important to phrase questions in a way that stays objective and doesn't appear to be leading, interrogating, or taking sides.

Another effective tactic, particularly when talking to experienced people, is to ask them to think out loud to explain how they made a decision or why they sized up a situation as they did.

Often perceptions and judgments of seasoned responders are so automatic that they don't realize they have distilled meaning from a vast amount of information. When encouraged to slow down and step through how a conclusion was reached, a person may start by saying, "I really didn't think about it. It was so obvious." Such inquiries can help translate or explain decisions across disciplines.

Summarizing

In understanding complex situations, it's important to summarize the larger portions and to make good mental or written notes. Summarizing allows all people involved in the discussion to realize that a conclusion has been reached in that area and the discussion can move on. Without these summaries, it can be unclear that people made a conclusion or what the conclusion was. Summarize the final facts and points. Verify the conclusions with the sender. Establish a common baseline so that discussions about solutions can begin.

Silence

Silence can be a valuable communication tool. In the first place, one cannot listen while talking, but in addition, silence can be used as an effective tool for gathering information.

During conversation, the speaker usually interprets a silence as encouragement to continue. Very few people are comfortable with the void of silence and speak to fill it with more explanation. When used carefully, and generally after some trust has been built, silence can be a powerful tool for gathering information.

For every word you speak, you also send with it context in the form of verbal inflection and nonverbal signals. You undermine your own message by crossing your words with your body language. Usually, the context means more because it is interpreted subconsciously.

Forming an Active Listening Response

Forming an active listening response takes practice. In some cases, the first response that comes to mind may shut down communication rather than eliciting more information.

Such responses are called *barrier statements*. Barrier statements compromise leader effectiveness because these words often deliver a negative subconscious message and increase resistance.

Look at the following common barrier responses, and their active listening alternatives:

Juan: I don't know, I'm kind of nervous about doing this.

You: (barrier statement) You can do it! It's simple.

You: (active listening response) What is it about the assignment that bothers you?

A word of caution: active listening can backfire unless you conduct it from a position of respect and honesty, not manipulation. The objective of active listening must be to clarify what the speaker is thinking and how they are feeling. If you engage in active listening to pacify a listener, it can backfire quickly and sabotage meaningful exchange

Direct Communication

Direct communication is vital to high-quality situational awareness. In times of stress when many factors compete for attention, direct statements cut through distractions.

Follow these guidelines when practicing direct communication:

■ Use the listener's name.

■ Start with "I"—This shows you take ownership of the statement.

■ Get to the point, state the facts.

■ Use the appropriate emotion.

■ Require a response.

■ If it doesn't work the first time, keep at it.

Examples of direct communication in an IMT context are when an OSC gives specific priorities to a DIVS or warns a SOFR of a particular danger.

Respectful Disagreement

In the heat of an incident, leaders tend to filter and focus heavily. It's easy to default to a *no news is good news* mentality in which a lack of new information contributes to an assumption that everything is going well. However, this attitude can perpetuate faulty situation awareness, and all team members must be vigilant about preventing this attitude from taking hold.

Team members have two responsibilities in relation to respectful disagreement:

■ Raise issues when they emerge. Use direct statements to communicate the situation.

■ Encourage and expect peers and team mates to do the same.

Any disagreement should always contain a recommendation for an alternative course of action that better serves the mission.

And if the recommendation is rejected? All team members have an obligation to follow their leader's direction, even if they believe the leader is following the wrong course of action. However, if the leader's decision places people in a position of doing something illegal, unprincipled, or unsafe, the ethical approach is to refuse the assignment and accept the consequences later.

Healthy conflict enables leaders to make better decisions. For an IMT, a LSC or SOFR could raise concerns about the feasibility of a tactic, or an FSC could raise concerns about costs.

Team Decision Making

The Decision Making Cycle
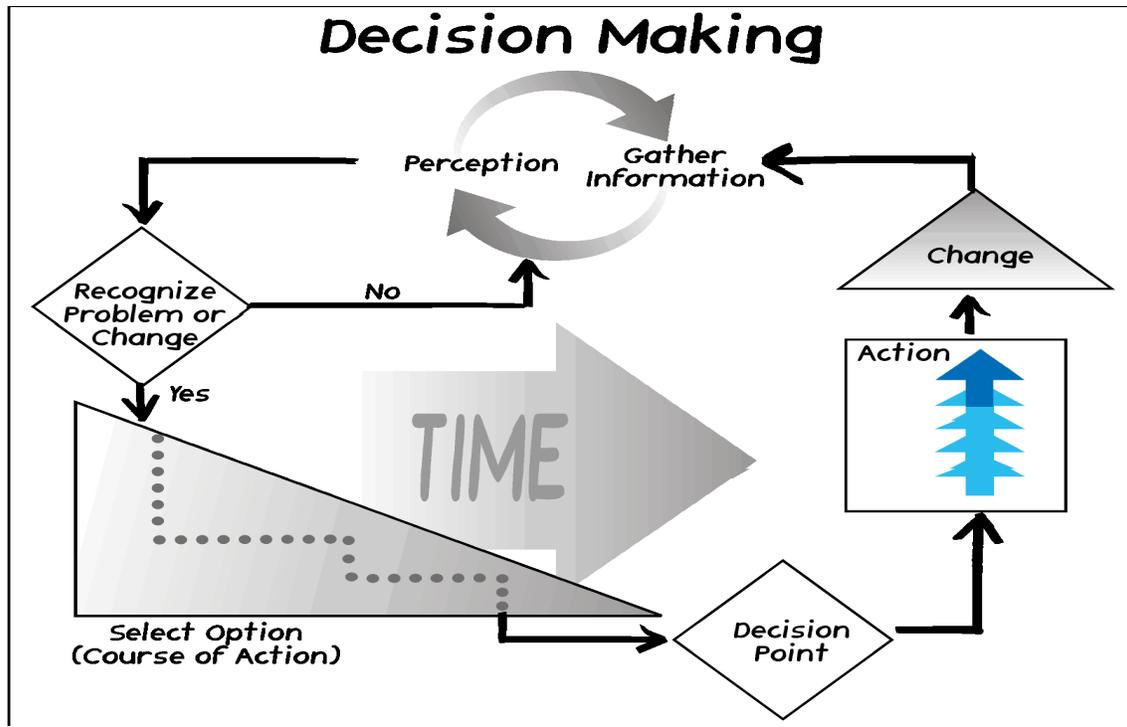
One of the IMT's primary responsibilities is to make decisions. The decision making of team members forms the basis for incident actions. This model graphically illustrates the decision making process. It shows a natural human process broken into its components. The purpose of using this model is provide a common tool and vocabulary to analyze and improve the soundness of decisions, particularly because the IAP is the result of numerous decisions and judgments.

The Planning P is a formalization of this natural, human process. By studying the decision making process without the forms and processes of ICS, we can better understand the purpose of the Planning-P and, for example, evaluate the effectiveness and quality of an IAP.

Situational Awareness and the Common Operating Picture

The decision making cycle begins with individuals gaining situational awareness: perceiving cues and gathering information. In the context of an incident, situational awareness encompasses a broad range of understanding including the larger context, what has happened to date, and the thinking that went into decisions.

Unlike most others in incident organizations, IMT leaders often do not form situational awareness based on direct observation of events. Instead, they rely on communication—written, face-to-face, telephone, radio, meetings, and briefings—to develop and refine their understanding of a problem and how well the response is addressing it. This constraint means that pursuing truth depends on strong communication practices, both to build and to share knowledge.

IMT leaders pool their situation awareness to develop a common operating picture(COP). The COP is the term used to describe the situational awareness and understanding shared by all

team members. The National Response Framework (NRF) glossary defines the common operating picture as follows:

> *A continuously updated overview of an incident compiled throughout an incident's life cycle from data shared between integrated systems for communication, information management, and intelligence and information sharing. The common operating picture allows incident managers at all levels to make effective, consistent, and timely decisions. The common operating picture also helps ensure consistency at all levels of incident management across jurisdictions, as well as between various governmental jurisdictions and private-sector and nongovernmental entities that are engaged.[2]*

Courses of Action

■   Mental Models

■   Coup d'ceil

■   Recognition-primed decision making (RPD)

When people make decisions, they often begin by incorporating their perception into a mental models they have gained from experience, be it from training or on incident. Sometimes, it requires only slight modifications of an existing model. For example, for law enforcement officers, most traffic stops resemble countless other traffic stops they have, except for minor incidental details. When they stop a motorist, they use their mental models to anticipate events. Sometimes a person's perceptions require assembling a new mental model from bits and pieces from several models. A firefighter, for example, may need to combine the mental model of a fire in a particular structure type with the mental model of unusual weather conditions to form an accurate model. In these circumstances, recognition of a problem and development of a course of action are virtually simultaneous.

Intuitively utilizing these mental models to select courses of action has been studied as long as people have been analyzing how people make decisions. For example, Clausewitz referred to it as the *coup d'œil*, or as a stroke of the eye, referring to the art of being able to seemingly size up a battlefield with only a glance. More recently, this intuitive decision making was studied by Gary Klein and referred to it as recognition-primed decision making, or RPD.

Experience can provide relevant shortcuts and valuable insight, or experience can compromise the quality of the decision when people resort to default remedies. IMT members need to be able to distinguish between the two and apply the best experiences to the situation at hand.

On an incident, the better that people from the various disciplines and functions understand each other's decisions, the more effective the IMT and its decisions. For example, a possible course of action that is obvious or intuitive to one may need to be explained to another.

---

[2] http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nrf/glossary

Commitment to the Team Decision

■ Credibility of the process

■ Congruence with time, difficulty, and capability

■ Refined through healthy conflict

Team decision making begins with each person making judgments about the importance of individual aspects of the COP. Leaders then come together with their perspectives and the responsibilities of their individual functions to determine about how to best accomplish the mission. Team decision making, then, often requires deliberation among leaders to reach sound decisions.

Many IMT training programs present various methods of decision making—such as authoritative, democratic, default, expert, consensus—and describe the strengths and weaknesses of each. However, understanding a particular method of decision making is incidental to understanding whether it is a credible process that team members will accept and ultimately support its outcome.

The credibility of the process depends on its congruence with the time allowed, the difficulty of the problem, the capabilities of the team to solve it, as well as other factors. For example, the more complex or challenging the problem, the more important it is to bring up pertinent details and to give team members the opportunity to voice questions or concerns.

When discussing a decision central to accomplishing the mission, encouraging healthy conflict that accounts for the various perspectives of the team helps to assure that a decision is sound. Furthermore, when decisions have been tempered and refined through healthy debate, team members are more likely to commit to them—even if they argued against the decision—as a good faith effort to uphold the value of service to the common good and to build unity of effort throughout the incident organization.

During an incident, the IMT C&G staff commits to the plan in the Planning Meeting and then the resources in the field commit to it at the Operations Briefing.

Decisional Traps

Decisional traps get in the way of effective decision making, often introducing significant error to the decision process and diminishing the quality of the decision.

Following are examples of decisional traps:

■ **The Juice is Watery**—The juice is slowly getting watered down, but no one realizes it. This snag occurs when people continue along a course of action without a critical analysis of measurable progress against a specific objective. The outcome is that the team puts a lot of work into a plan that does not yield results commensurate with the level of effort.

■ **Short-Term Gain (Long-Term Pain)**—A decision is made without thinking through long-term consequences or without coming up with contingencies if the assumptions of the original plan change.

■ **Finger Crossing**—Gaps of knowledge are bridged with hope. "*They 'should' be bringing the water"* is an indicator that a gap exists between hope and reality.

■ **Herd Mentality**—Groups generate energy and enthusiasm that can stifle disagreement or healthy conflict. No one wants to speak up and derail the train.

■ **Form Over Function**—In contrast to the value of *form and function defining the end state,* the system takes on a life of its own. Its known processes are comfortable and well-

understood, and thus, seems to carry little risk. In contrast, decisions that conflict with the system have all kinds of unknowns, carry all kinds of risks, and are much more likely to be scrutinized.

- **Jumping to Conclusions**—The human ability to make sense from fragmented pieces of information represents a powerful capability for increasing understanding. In some cases, however, especially when the context is vague and the situation urgent, the ability to fill in the blanks may result in jumping to conclusions and incorrectly likening current circumstances to previous experience.

- **Slippery Slope**—This decisional trap can center on an ethical issue or take the form of scope or mission creep. Before you know it, a line has been crossed.

The purposes of the ICS planning process is to avoid these traps, particularly in preparing for the Planning meeting.

Counteracting Decisional Traps

When decisional traps become apparent, the following represent ways of countering the flawed thinking:

- **Analyze progress relative to objective**—"*We started out making some progress here, then we went to two steps forward, one step back. Now we're only taking one step forward and two steps back. Let's reevaluate this, and consider a change in tactics.*"

- **War-game second- and third-order effects**—"*I want to hear from our weather people and analysts—if we implement this plan, what's the most likely outcome? What about the most dangerous outcome?*"

- **Challenge assumptions**—"*OK, let's not confuse enthusiasm with capability. What I just heard is that "with any luck" we'll have it done by nightfall. Are you comfortable allowing hope to be the plan?*"

- **Demand minority opinions**—"*Dave, be our devil's advocate here. Put yourself in the public's shoes. What are your thoughts? What are we missing?*"

- **Utilize 70% solution**—"*We're getting in the weeds here. We can't over-engineer this, too much is going to change if we try and plan everything out. We have very capable DIVS out there. Let's get them our intent and let them do their jobs.*"

- **Validate Perceptions**—"*Let's not start making a plan based on a rumor. Where did you hear about the trucks being delayed? Let's get that verified before we start getting spun up.*"

- **Use team trigger points**—"*Time Out! We got a Fog Alert! I think Ops and Logs are working off two different scripts. Let's have a quick huddle to make sure we're really on the same page here.*"

Leader's Intent

Initiative and Empowerment Doctrine

In order for leaders to encourage initiative, they need to communicate what is to be done, why it ought to be done, and how it should look when done.

Successful operations are built on the ability of leaders to define and communicate the intent behind decisions in order to empower subordinates to exercise initiative. Everyone, from commander to the last crew member, should be able to define the end state and have a shared understanding of the purpose behind the task.

Leader's intent began as a doctrine with Napoleon at the end of the 18th Century. During this period in history, improvements in weapons and tactics made situations on the battlefield move ever faster across ever greater distances. Leaders began to realize that the same technologies and capabilities that allowed them to operate across continents also made managing them—let alone micro-managing them—more and more difficult. Before an order could travel from general to subordinate, the situation had already changed.

In 1830, Carl Von Clausewitz wrote *On War*, a strategic treatise that captured the lessons of Napoleon and greatly expanded modern strategic doctrine. He stated that friction, danger, and uncertainty would constantly combine on the battlefield to create the *fog of war,* a metaphor for the chaotic conditions where centralized command and control becomes increasingly untenable.

Von Clausewitz also stated that in this *fog of war* that it would be the moral factors of an Army— their cohesion, character, initiative, and empowerment—that would be the deciding factor. The Prussian army built on this foundation for leader's intent and turned it into the doctrine of *Auftragstaktik*, or mission-oriented orders.

Auftragstaktik is defined as the principle of empowering subordinates to exercise initiative in the fluid, chaotic conditions of the battlefield by ensuring that they understand the purpose behind their mission. Inevitably, the time comes when reality places teams in a battle against the environment, and the commander's direct guidance is out of the picture. In these circumstances, their chances for success hinge on the quality of the empowerment that leaders have provided.

Auftragstaktik is an example of the history of developing doctrine that defines how leaders can empower initiative in extreme environments by providing the leader's intent. If people have to be told to do specific tasks, you've lost it. Maintaining relative superiority (and not *losing* it), requires—at a minimum—clear leader's intent.

Leader's intent describes the quality of direction from the leader to followers, whether it is an informal discussion, an IAP, or a delegation of authority. ICS formalizes the process of developing and communication direction to the team and the community.

Components of Leader's Intent

In the military, this doctrine was formalized because the vastness and complexity of the operational environment overwhelmed the natural tendency to micromanage. Leader's intent originated as a statement of what soldiers must do to succeed and what that success looks like when accomplished—the end state. Today, leader's intent achieves the same aim. A well-defined end state, along with the understanding of the big picture, allows leaders and team members to adapt and exercise initiative when the situation changes.

Clear leader's intent, also known as *briefing elements,* ensures that an assignment communicates enough guidance in each of three areas to foster initiative:

- **Task**—What is to be done?
- **Purpose**—Why it is to be done?
- **End state**—How should it look when complete?

The terms "task" "purpose" and "end state" do not correlate directly to ICS doctrine, although this concept is introduced in ICS 200. These terms are a common short hand. It is similar to saying that leaders provide motivation, purpose, and direction. Whether it is informal communication or a fully published IAP, people should be able to identify what it is to be done, why it is to done, and what success looks like.

Think of an experience where a supervisor described to you *how* to do your job in detail (to the level that any rookie already knows how) rather than *what* to do.

Example of Leader's Intent

The following is an example of leader's intent for a multi-vehicle, multi-casualty accident resulting from a high-speed pursuit.

Injured people are transported to appropriate medical facilities to expedite care. Impact to commercial and public traffic is mitigated as quickly as possible. Reasonable efforts are made to maintain integrity of the scene for criminal investigators.

We will achieve this end state by performing the following tasks:

- Extracting injured from vehicles as quickly as possible;
- Establishing triage area;
- Securing landing zone or zones for flight-for-life aircraft;
- Setting up timely transport of injured based on triage criteria;
- Implementing traffic control protocols; and
- Cordoning off the accident scene.

Characteristics of Effective Leader's Intent

- Emodies the value of Mission-Driven Culture;
- Is based on principles;
- Promotes flexibility, innovation, and initiative in operators; and
- Requires judgment to formulate.

The most effective leader's intent embodies the values of the Mission-Driven Culture. In other words, leader's intent reflects a principles-based rather than a rules-based approach. The difference between the two is best explained by the definition of a rules-based approach.

Decisions and actions based on rules have the following restraints:

- Management defines in specific terms what is done and how it is done.
- The organization deems such decisions as unable to be, or no value in being, delegated to subordinate leaders.
- Exceptions to the rules are not allowed or are reserved for only the highest levels of authority.

■ Guidance has the tone of a commandment—*thou shall* or *thou shall not.*

In contrast, when leaders provide their guidance based on principles, they rely on human judgment and interpretation for implementation; they promote flexibility, innovation, and initiative in operators. Because leader's intent must be definitive enough to guide specific decisions yet general enough to address diverse and varied situations, a focus on applying a principle-based approach enables effective execution in a dynamic, indeterminate environment.

Organizational Levels of Leader's Intent

Traditionally, the doctrine of leader's intent requires that people executing the plan were aware not only of their own intent but of that from their leaders who were at least two echelons above them. On an incident, leader's intent begins with an elected official, a governor or the President, for example. It then flows to an Agency Administrator and then to an Incident Commander. From the IC, it then flows out to everyone on the incident. As it moves through each level of the organization, the essence and tone of the intent changes. What is essential in a briefing to an IC is not the same as in a briefing to a Branch Director or to a public health official monitoring air quality.

The ICS formalizes many of the processes and procedures formulating and communicating leader's intent to expedite the effort. The quality can then be judged by how well it answers the principles of leader's intent: Does it explain what is to be done? Why it ought to be done? How it ought to look when completed?

Formulating Clear Intent

How one formulates leader's intent with the appropriate level of specificity for a situation depends on the situation. The spectrum of specificity is reflected in the spectrum of leadership styles. Judging the most appropriate type of leadership requires a flexible, principles-based approach.

The following is an overview of three leadership styles that represent this spectrum:

■ **Directing—**In its purest form, the directing style requires specifying all parts of a task—who, what, when, where, and how. It is the leadership style most closely aligned with a rules-based approach. Certain conditions warrant using this approach. For example, it is appropriate when the timeframe is short and the particulars of the task are straightforward or known only to the person providing the direction. It is also appropriate to use this style dealing with inexperienced people who lack experience and competence at a task.

■ **Participating—**The participating style entails involving those assigned to a task to determine what to do and how to do it, asking for recommendations and information. This kind of give-and-take builds confidence and increases ownership in the plan. It also increases team cohesion. This style is appropriate when the timeframe is less restricted and the task is being assigned to operators who have a reasonable amount of experience in similar circumstances.

■ **Delegating—**The delegating style calls for entrusting someone else with decisions about how to carry out a task. In contrast to the directing style, delegating is appropriate when the person receiving the assignment has the competence and experience required for success.

Determining which leadership style is appropriate in any given situation requires judgment about numerous factors: the experience and trustworthiness of the person receiving the assignment, the values at risk, time available, stability of the environment, amount of clarity regarding possible risks.

Applying Leadership Principles to an IMT

Think about the application of these principles to the planning process:

■   How does command presence contribute to fostering a Mission-Driven Culture?

■   How and why is communication important in developing a sound operating picture?

■   Why is healthy conflict important in developing sound team decisions?

■   How do you formulate leader's intent that foster's initiative?