

Managing dangerous situations



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The split second syndrome (Fyfe, 1998)

No two situations are alike: there are no general principles
The only way to manage dangerous situations is to train officers to react quickly
Because of the pressure and the short time available, it is inevitable that outcomes are sometimes unsatisfactory: any criticism after the fact is unjust and compromises future decisiveness



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The split second syndrome (Fyfe, 1998)

Any judgement on police action in dangerous situations may only be based on the circumstances during the situation: if police responded to a provocation by civilian, the responsibility for the outcome lies with the civilian



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Phases (Sharf & Binder)

Anticipation
arrival and initial contact
information exchange
Tactics of physical control
Final frame decision
Aftermath



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Phases in judgement (Pauwels e.a, 1994)

Distinction between Initial & Situational judgement
If initial judgement effective, situational judgement is much simplified



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Training for dangerous situations

- Observation and assessment
- Judgement and decision-making
- Acting

- Traditionally, the emphasis is on acting



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Managing dangerous situations: a situations oriented approach and training

(Adang & Timmer, 1998)



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Five basic questions
(goal-approach analysis)

What are the risks?
What is my goal?
Am I allowed to achieve the goal?
Am I able to achieve the goal?
How do I achieve the goal (what is my plan)



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“Dealing with conflict situations: looking for good practices”

Adang, Kop & Ferwerda, 2004

- What approaches do police officers use in different types of conflict situations?
- What (elements of) these approaches can be considered good practice?



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Focus on situations of **potential** conflict

- Interactions with the mentally disturbed
- Interactions in entertainment districts
- Interactions with groups of (migrant) youngsters



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Data gathering

Documents: 13 forces
3 group interviews with experts (police/ non-police)
observations in 10 forces: 57 shifts, 467h, 119 officers
interviews with observed officers



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% of use of (elements of) goal- approach analysis (N=64)

	Initial	Situational
Assess risks?	10	9
Ask additional information?	13	13
Formulate a goal?	18	28
Assess powers?	2	13
Assess possibilities?	7	14
Formulate a plan?	10	13
Communicate about approach?	13	22



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Use of goal-approach analysis

- Officers who work together more often, tend to use more elements of the goal-approach analysis, both initially and situationally (Chi-square tests, $p < .05$)
 - requesting extra information
 - assessing powers
 - assessing possibilities



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No two situations alike?

- Interactions with mentally disturbed
 - annoyance in public spaces
 - annoyance in private spaces
 - dealing with a confused/ suicidal individual
 - returning a psychiatric patient



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No two situations alike?

- Groups of (migrant) youths
 - annoyance in public spaces
 - implementing a low/ “zero” tolerance policy



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No two situations alike?

- Entertainment districts
 - fight in the street
 - problem at the door
 - implementing low/ “zero” tolerance policy (eg for urinating in a public)



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No general principles?

- Importance of information
- Importance of planning
- Importance of communication between officers
- Importance of communication with individuals concerned/ public
- Incidents are often not isolated
- Important to use “experts” or specialist knowledge
- Important to cooperate with partners



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Differences

- Entertainment districts
 - good cooperation with partners (protocols)
 - more planned deployment
- (Migrant) youths
 - mutual hostility
 - no awareness of good practices
- Mentally disturbed
 - often poor cooperation with partners
 - little use of good practices



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Important preconditions

- Leadership
- Personell: number, competencies, familiarity, culture
- Strategy and policy
- Means: eg powers, equipment
- Management of processes: dependent on information, organisation of work, cooperation arrangements with others



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Attitude

- “safety attitude”: dealing with risk
- “interaction attitude”: dealing with people
 - based on behaviour vs based on category/ stereotype/ reputation
 - treat people as you want to be treated yourself vs treat people as they treat you
 - problematic with (migrant) youths



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Officers' perception of behavioral control

- Entertainment districts: yes (but negative side-effects of low/zero-tolerance approach: increased use of force)
- Mentally disturbed: limited by unpredictability and by lack of follow-up
- (Migrant) youths: no. Sense of powerlessness



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Conclusions

- Many similar incidents
- There are general principles
- Availability of personell and means are not most important preconditions
- There is a lot of expertise, but:
 - No debriefings
 - Little or no communication within police about practices
 - Knowledge about good practices is often not used (transfer problem?)



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