

In order to allow for a shared vocabulary, negotiation of risk assessments and appropriate distribution of resources, (cultural, linguistic, and conceptual) translation is needed.

Guiding Questions

Is your system able to manage different professional and cultural languages? How can that be achieved?

Does the collaborative information management system offer different communication pathways when translation is necessary? If so, how might it be possible to avoid discrimination?

Further Information

Incident command models may be dominant, but they do not always lead to clean interoperability, as different agencies use different terminologies and their individual command and control models have distinct structural elements. Even on the most general level, terminology problems can emerge within the different adaptations of this model. In some cases, the terms run in parallel, or simply require familiarity for identification, such as Gold / Silver / Bronze and Level 1 / Level 2 / Level 3 often seen throughout Europe. In other situations, the same words are used to mean different actions, roles, or even levels of command. This is a concern commonly brought up within the case studies and overlaps greatly with interoperability and information flow, as locally or organisationally bound terminology affects the ability of groups to work together. These problems occur between different first responder organisations, and between first responders and external aid groups. To address this issue, linguistic, structural and conceptual 'translation' is needed to support coordination across different frameworks. Furthermore, understanding the range of stakeholders that are frequently involved in types of disaster response can better prepare these groups for the jargon problems that will likely occur.

Examples

Multiple roles: In their study of collaboration between emergency agencies in the UK, McMaster and Baber (2012) find that even between different fire-services from different regions, different incident command models are in operation (Fig.1):



In regards to the Walham Power Station flooding that they analyse, this means that the Fire

and Rescue Services needed to modify their standard organisational structures to take account of the use of multi-county resources and the wider flooding emergency. This resulted in the bypassing of Silver (tactical) Command, which appears to have led to a loss of situation awareness at this level of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue's major incident command structure.

Same Model, Different terms: The initial model designed by the US has two basic command roles at different levels in the system: a tactical officer who determines field decisions and an operational officer who is in charge of the bigger picture strategies. In the UK, however, the roles associated with the titles are flipped and thus the terms, in general, refer to different levels of response. In Norway, tactical refers to actions in the field and the PBS incident commander handles keeping the media and partner organizations informed of the situation, a role often separated from the incident commander and given to a public information officer in other interpretations of the model. Or in Italy, the procedure for who is in control is through nominations.

Language Differences: In 1987 a tornado struck the mainly Spanish-speaking town Saragosa in Texas. As Tierney (2006) reports the popular local Spanish-language cable station did not broadcast the warnings directly from the National Weather Service. The warnings that did get disseminated in Spanish – although later than the English ones – were poorly translated on the spot and failed to convey the severity and urgency of the threat. The tornado killed 30 and injured 120 residents.

Resources

McMaster, R., and Baber, C. (2012). Multi-agency operations: Cooperation during flooding. *Applied Ergonomics*, 43(1), 38-47. [DOI] [Link]

Petersen, K. et al (2014) D2.01 Overview of disaster events, crisis management models and stakeholders. *SecInCoRe Project EU Deliverable*. [Link]

Petersen, K. et al (2015) D2.02 ELSI guidelines for collaborative design and database of representative emergency and disaster. *SecInCoRe Project EU Deliverable*. [Link]

Rademaekers, K., Eichler, L., Holt Andersen, B., Madsen, N., and Rattinger, M. (2009). Strengthening the EU capacity to respond to disasters: Identification of the gaps in the capacity of the Community Civil Protection Mechanism to provide assistance in major disasters and options to fill the gaps – A scenario-based approach. *Netherlands:*

ECORYS [[Link](#)]

Tierney, K., Bevc, C. and Kuligowski, E. (2006). Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 604: 57-81. [[DOI](#)]