

Inter-organisational cooperation in major incidents - what do emergency services require for smooth operations?

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Abstract

Major incidents such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters demand successful inter-organisational cooperation and communication of emergency services. There is little knowledge about specific requirements of inter-organisational cooperation in the field of safety research, e.g., what kind of information do members of the emergency services expect from other agencies or how the exchange, validation, and integration of information takes place. Requirements for shared situation assessment in major incidents were investigated in a German government-funded research project (LAGE). Incident commanders from police, urban fire departments, rescue services and civil authorities who need to cooperate in major incidents were interviewed. As common ground for the interviews, a rail accident scenario occurring in the central station of a German city hosting a big event was used. Additional data came from the observations of a German National Crisis Management Exercise (LÜKEX). Qualitative analysis yielded communication requirements as seen by staff of the emergency services. Relevant technical prerequisites for establishing a shared assessment of the situation are: continuous flow of information between different technical systems and consultants as well as shared language-codes and the possibility to verify sources of information. On the organisational level, knowledge about the other organisations' goals and structures and individuals' willingness to cooperate seem critical factors.

Introduction

Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and major incidents seem to affect society more and more frequently. In these incidents, several emergency organisations are involved in coping with the disaster. In extraordinary events and under dynamic and chaotic conditions, the first challenge lies in recognizing danger and anticipating damage in the affected area. Next, the demand for resources needs to be allocated. Another challenge in major incidents is the integration of multiple agencies and jurisdiction to manage those extraordinary events. Comfort and Kapucu (2006) discuss the challenges within extreme events such as the World Trade Centre attack 2001. One key to successful management of major incidents seems to be smooth inter-organisational cooperation and communication of emergency services, e.g., first responders and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., Therrien 1995; Comfort & Capucu, 2006).

In D. de Waard, N. Gérard, L. Onnasch, R. Wiczorek, and D. Manzey (Eds.) (2011). *Human Centred Automation* (pp. 197 - 201). Maastricht, the Netherlands: Shaker Publishing.