

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PLANNERS, DEVELOPERS, AND MANAGERS OF CRISIS TEAM EXERCISES

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## **Introduction**

In cases of regional or national crisis situations and disasters, the police, the fire brigade, the government, medical care, water management departments and the military force cooperate in ad hoc composed multidisciplinary teams. In order to be able to operate effectively in these high risk situations, the team members are trained initially and once in service, every region in The Netherlands organizes team exercises. The people developing and coordinating these exercises are responsible for the educational quality of their design and processes. Moreover, they are held accountable for contribution of these exercises to the development of Crisis Management Teams over time. This requires long term planning and evaluation, and the capability of influencing the processes in the field.

In our view this job has been underestimated for years. We state that developing, coordinating and evaluating multidisciplinary team exercises for crisis management is a profession. The people doing this job we call Process Managers of Exercises. With the support of the Ministry of Internal Affairs we designed a professional development program with a train-the-trainer character for these process managers in 2004. In the meantime, we organized the program 6 times. 80 professionals have participated and now form a network. We will at least continue until 2010. In this period of time we will develop the program into a certificated one, in line with the increased quality requirements of the government for crisis management.

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In this paper we will present our view on the profession of planning, developing, coordinating and evaluating exercises for multidisciplinary Crisis Management teams. We will outline our views on the methodology of Crisis Management exercises and on the processes that have to be managed and supported by such Process Managers. We will also explain how our programme provides opportunities for individual and organisational development of crisis managers and crisis management.

## **Towards a profession of exercise planning and process management**

### The need for exercises

Since disasters seldom occur, those who are supposed to respond to them, and to control them, do not have enough opportunities to practice the competences they need to perform adequately under these extreme circumstances. Exercises are needed to provide them with experiences as close to reality as possible, so they learn what to do and how to do it, once an emergency, a disaster, or a crisis would turn up. Society has developed and the risks have increased. Terrorism, bird flu, SARS, increased and high speed transport, chemical industry, nuclear power etc. have all become more and more common phenomena in our society and so have all the related risks. In the last century our society had grown more complex than our disaster management structure could cope with.

### New times, new demands, new roles

Already as far back as the mid eighties of the last century the Dutch government decided to change the structure of emergency response and crisis management in the Netherlands. Society had grown too complex for the system as it existed in those days. Especially the reliance on civilians was no longer perceived as adequate. A need for professionalizing the management structure has arisen. The civil organisation that had been involved in disaster management ceased to exist and it was decided that the fire brigade would take a prominent role in disaster management. As a consequence the role of firemen changed. They, from that moment on, had to have the overview of all areas of disaster management (medical, public order, public safety and governance). Furthermore they had to take the lead in preparing all parties concerned for adequate performance once a crisis or a disaster would occur. Regional fire brigades were supposed to take the lead in organising multidisciplinary exercises together with all other organisation in the field of disaster management.

### Exercises require promotion

For many years the Ministry of Internal Affairs invested in efforts to promote training activities and multidisciplinary exercises to help local and regional authorities to upgrade the level of preparation of their disaster management staff. Gradually the number of exercises increased and gradually the awareness of the necessity of exercising grew, but still it depended too much on the good will of the local and regional authorities, so new national decisions and measures followed making it clear what the frequency of exercises would have to be, who should participate and how often. The number of organisations involved also increased. Organisations for water management (among the oldest government bodies in the Dutch society) took part, public services and private organisations (railway, bus companies, etc) entered the arena of exercises. However, not enough exercises took place nor did enough people join in. Still the situation needed further improvement.

### Exercises often had too narrow a focus

The focus of exercises was often limited. Those in charge of preparing them focused on exercises as incidental events. Too few of them had the long term learning process that exercises are supposed to evoke in mind.

Not only the ones preparing the exercises had this narrow scope, often also the authorities (ab)used exercises for purposes other than professional and organisation development. They saw opportunities of publicity, or they felt they could well use exercises for political reasons.

These goals, valid as they may be, often interfered with the goals the developers had in mind. They as a consequence saw themselves confronted with complex situation in which they had to deal with conflicting ideas and interests.

#### Managing exercise processes became a profession

Gradually it became obvious that the ones responsible for managing the process of exercises and series of exercises might better be considered professionals with a broad and complex professional profile. Their job had grown into a series of activities far beyond the incidental preparation of an occasional exercise. For them to their work properly they would need to have:

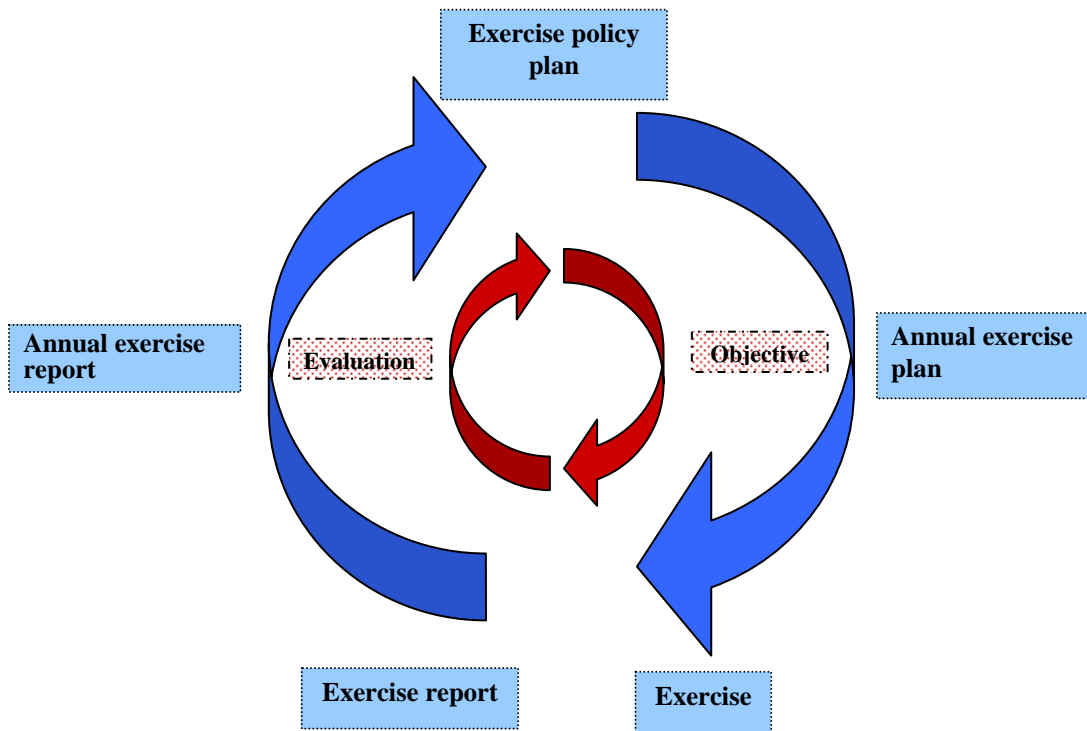
1. an overview of the field of disaster management;
2. the ability to analyse the infrastructure in their region, its objects, its risks and its weak spots);
3. an overview of the level of preparation of the organisations involved in disaster management;
4. the competence to engage in negotiations with all parties concerned about priorities in disaster management and in preparing for it;
5. the competence to develop policy plans for the long term from which year plans and plans for single exercises may be derived;
6. the competence to translate policy plans into plans for single exercises and in specific exercise designs, settings, scenarios, and methods;
7. the competence to derive from the experiences and the evaluations of such exercises revised and upgraded plans for further action;
8. The ability to reflect upon the whole process of policy making and exercising from a learning perspective and identify progress and find new ways to move these learning processes (individual, collective and organisation processes) forward.

#### **A Trajectory for professional development of exercise managers**

Once it had been recognized that the planning, developing and managing exercises required professional staff with a varied set of competences the Ministry of Internal Affairs took the initiative of promoting the idea of a special training programme for such professionals. The National Institute of Physical Safety( NIFV), Twijnstra en Gudde (TG) and Platform Opleiding Onderwijs en Organisatie BV (PLATO) of Leiden University in response to this initiative developed a trajectory for these professional exercise process managers.

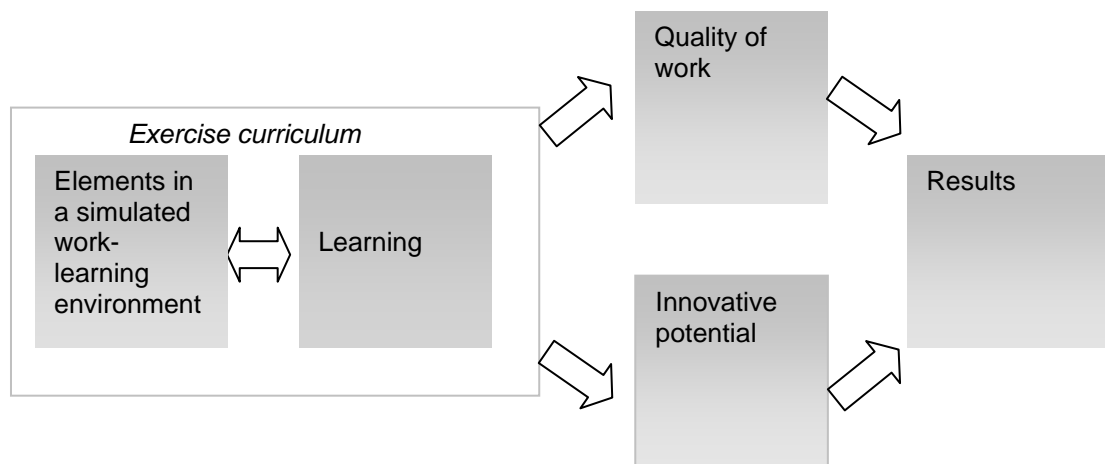
#### Exercises as impulses in an ongoing process

The first element in the philosophy underlying the plans is the fact that we consider exercises not to be stand alone activities. We see them as catalysts and impulses to a longer process of learning of individuals, teams and of organisations. As such exercises are elements in a longer process of policy making and planning. We assumed a region would make a four year policy plan, derive year plan from it and then develop exercise. Each exercise will be completed with a report and these reports will be analysed and may lead to revision of the longer term policies. as shown in the figure below (infopunt veiligheid, <http://www.nifv.nl/web/show/id=93371>).



Scheme 1: the exercise policy planning cycle

The scheme shows the process as a set of consecutive steps of planning. It does not show though the social complexity of it, nor does it reveal the internal dynamics, the policy making process, or the cultural differences between the organisations involved. Professionals who direct, or facilitate these processes, need to be good counterparts in the discussions with anyone involved. They will have to be persuasive; they must be able to reach compromises. Furthermore they must be good at writing policy documents and in gaining support from and giving support to people. Of course they must be able to develop exercises (from workshops to full scale realistic exercise). They will have to be good monitors and evaluators. Leading the exercise may require managerial competences, and finally they will have to show leadership in the over all process of managing the long term learning itinerary of all individuals, teams and organisations involved. This is even all the more complex since the organisational structures of the organisations taking part in disaster and crisis management change, once a crisis occurs. So apart from the participating standing organisational structure, there is also the incidental crisis management structure, often with a co-coordinating major, or with provincial, or national interventions and responsibilities. Those in charge of the exercise process will have to be aware of the fact that they are responsible for, and contributing to this complex learning process of all organisations and all staff involved. The exercise is an incidental impulse to make this permanent learning process move on. These ideas are based on theories on knowledge productivity in which organisations are seen as entities that may develop a greater potential for quality and innovation if they systematically create learning opportunities in real life or simulated work settings (Kessels, J .W.M.1996, Lakerveld, J.A. van, 2005).



The basic idea is that by creating a motivating environment in which all people will find challenges and experiences as well as feedback to their performance, these people will learn from their experiences. Thus they will be more competent in delivering high quality work and more innovative in their work. These qualities are highly relevant for those who have to deal with extreme circumstances. The ultimate outcome of the learning process they engage in exercises or in actual crises is better performance in future situations. This thesis was tested in a variety of work fields and considerable evidence was found to support it (Lakerveld, J.A. van, 2005).

#### A trajectory instead of a training course

In order to establish a more professional practice of exercise planning and management it seemed wise not to assume that any one of the parties concerned would have the expertise to impose a plan to the others. It seemed wiser and more consistent to the basic philosophy of this initiative to seek synergy between all partners. First of all there were the three organisations mentioned each having their own expertise. NIFV has long standing content expertise in disaster management, TG has special expertise in governance and in team dynamics, and PLATO brought its expertise in knowledge productivity, organisational learning and exercise methodology. We were aware that also participants would represent a body of knowledge covering all of the areas mentioned, and in addition they would add field knowledge. We have been looking for ways to bring all these perspectives in one mutually beneficial structure and decided to name it a trajectory. We see ourselves all as travellers to a remote goal of professional disaster management supported by professional processes of exercising and learning. Both the facilitators and the participants seek to exploit the arrangement for the purpose of their individual, collective and organisational learning.

#### Outline of the trajectory

The trajectory consists of four blocks of two days each allowing for a period of time in between for practical assignments, or analyses in the home organisations. The whole trajectory covers a period of approximately 3 to 4 months.

Planning	Preparation	Execution	Evaluation
Policies and planning	Developing exercises	Group dynamics	Feedback techniques
Knowledge productivity as a fundament	Scenario issues	Presentation and feedback techniques	Development plans

Communication and negotiation styles	Methodology	Planning for change	Final reflective session
Peer feed back session	Peer feed back session	Peer feed back session	

Scheme 2: Outline of the programme

A manager of learning

Because of the special character of the programme in which all parties are seen as learners, we included a number of peer feedback sessions to allow for discussions and mutual help in problematic work situations. Furthermore we decided to have a manager of learning present during the whole trajectory. The responsibility of this person is to see to it that all participants have the best opportunities to fulfil their learning needs. For that purpose the manager of learning has intake interviews with each participant well in advance. During the trajectory the expectations and goals may further develop. This development is permanently monitored during, aside and in between sessions.

The content of the sessions

As indicated in the programme outlined above attention is devoted to four consecutive phases of exercise planning and development. Within each phase three levels of content are included:

- Strategic issues and methodology
- Groups dynamics and teamwork
- Intervention techniques and skills training,

Within the framework of this paper we will not go into the details of the programme. We will just outline the main domains covered. The emphasis lies on a few content areas. The first area is the organisational development aspect of exercises. Exercise are meant to contribute to the learning processes of the ones taking part in it, but maybe even more so to the development of their home organisations and work procedures. The main efforts to be invested in exercising are the follow up activities to be derived from the lessons learned. A second content area concerns the actual development of exercises. It includes the development of both the content and of the methods of the exercise. Themes covered are among others:

Content	Methodology
Setting	Goals
Plot	Reasons for exercising
Model	Instruction
Scenario	Assignments
Production	Monitoring
Players	Intervention
Roles	Feedback
Infrastructure	Assessment
Tools	Evaluation

Scheme 3: Overview of exercise development issues

A third domain includes the processes within the teams that take part during an exercise. It covers working under stress, processes of giving and receiving feedback, group dynamics, leadership, learning styles and work styles.

A fourth content area concerns the competences an exercise leader needs to intervene in, or to evaluate exercises. It includes methods and techniques of both intervention and interaction in groups.

Throughout the whole trajectory attention is paid to issues of evaluation. Evaluation, we believe, is something of vital importance in exercises and far beyond that. It may include evaluation of:

- The status quo
- The level of participants
- Exercises as such (as a planning document)
- The implementation of exercises
- The participation in exercises
- Learning outcomes of participants
- Consequences for work procedures, equipment, infrastructure, organisational structures
- Effects and long term impact.

As may be derived from this list we stress the importance of evaluation as the engine of the learning processes of all parties concerned. It is evident that such a conceptualisation of evaluation implies that evaluation is seen as equally continuous as the learning processes it must facilitate.

## **Discussion**

After having given the above outline of the professional development of planners, developers, and managers of exercises, we now mention a number of issues and professional dilemmas we have either deliberately included in the trajectories, or that emerged during the process.

- The trajectory with its rich realm of inputs by experts, learning managers and people facilitating the peer feedback sessions offers a rich variety of learning opportunities;
- The fact that people meet within our trajectory adds to their sense of being professionals and of being a professional group;
- Those in charge of the exercise policies and exercises often feel they lack the power and the influence to implement what they think would be beneficial to their region;
- Many of the participants in the trajectories show an interest in developing and executing an exercise rather than in managing the over all long term learning process;
- The strategic and political issues at stake and the competences of consultancy, negotiation and persuasion needed in order to make valorise the exercise policies require a reflective and strategic mindset. Participants, however, often show a much more practical operational inclination;
- The field of exercises requires a set of competences that probably may seldom be found in one person;
- Trajectories still do not suffice to keep the message alive. We noticed we had to organize reunion meetings, we had to provide follow up work shops in order not to lose members form our growing network of process managers.
- The level of process managers to be is not homogeneous; we have participants with a vocational background as well as with academic backgrounds. We feel we need them both, but that each of them separately is missing something.
- There is a continuous call for tools and procedures, while we think that what is needed is more reflection, more initiative, and more responsibility. Asking for more tools seems to be the easy way out. Again it is probably not one way or the other but both ways;
- Exercises tend to be too complicated for the purposes they are serving. We recommend that exercises should be as simple as possible for the purposes serving. Lots of money may be saved that way.
- In the Netherlands the cultural differences between the organisations that take part in crisis management is so big that it interferes with the necessity of multidisciplinary exercises. It would require further study to seek ways in which these different cultures may reach the synergy needed.

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