

Crisis Clock *e-book*

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Welcome

There is a saying that goes like this: “Fail to plan, then plan to fail”. That’s ok if you have the time to plan but what happens when you have to deploy a team internationally with only four hours notice before the team has to be on a plane? Well firstly, there isn’t a lot of time to plan the deployment. Oh, and did I mention that included in that four hours is the travel time from Sydney to Canberra via road?

These were the actual circumstances surrounding the deployment of the first NSW Police teams into Thailand following the Boxing Day tsunami. Those of us who work in the forensic area are used to the phone call from scenes of death and destruction requiring immediate response. But the call to Thailand sent a mild case of panic through those of us who have dealt with crisis all our professional lives.

Try to imagine for a moment how you would be feeling as you fly into the site of such a disaster. Before you can see any of the bodies, you can smell them! Sitting in the helicopter travelling up the coast, you smell the unmistakable smell of death. This time there are over 3500 bodies laying in the grounds of a temple. You simply can’t be prepared for this. There aren’t too many people in the world who have even seen 3500 bodies at once, let alone had the responsibility of stepping into the chaos and leading a way out.

Having dealt with crisis like this all through my policing career, what I have experienced personally and observed in others, are common patterns in behaviour and emotion as the crisis evolves and resolves. I’ve found that these observations, when shared with others, have proved a useful tool for managing crisis in any forum and also that they have particular relevance in the field of project management. To communicate the patterns in behaviour and emotion, I have developed a model called the “crisis clock” and that model is the subject of this 5 part e-book. I have learnt much, in responding to the disasters of Bali and Thailand, and have compiled tips on what I consider are the three essential keys to help to manage and then move through each sector of the crisis clock.

Read on, enjoy the stories, take the learnings on board and let me know what you think

Regards,

Pete

Overview

Think about the feelings that arise in the initial stages of a crisis. They tend to be those of excitement, anxiousness, worry and mild panic. An internal questioning of one's competence is often encountered, even if not spoken about.

For most of us the feeling we have around times like this is one that we describe in Crisis Management as the **frantic** stage. This is often the beginning of a journey and the situation we find ourselves in is unexpected, a little out of control and challenging our different emotions.

There will be a point in time during the deployment when, as strange as this sounds, there is a semblance of normality around dealing with 5395 bodies located at a number of sites across Thailand. At this point there is a direction as to the way out of the chaos and although few steps have been taken down this path, at least now it is clear where the beginning of the trail is. When you can see the path you traditionally have moved from frantic into the **controlled** stage.

The controlled stage has seen the panic and frantic energy almost totally disappear and there is now order to what has to occur next. You may have been down this path before, or if not, there is at least sufficient time for you to consider your options.

When you realise that you are no longer totally consumed with the event, despite the undeniable enormity of it, there is a good chance you have moved out of the controlled stage. Your senses are no longer confronted as they were in the helicopter on the way in and you know the way down the path. You even start to have that ground hog day feel about things. – been here, done that. You are then well and truly out of the controlled stage and now into the **working** stage.

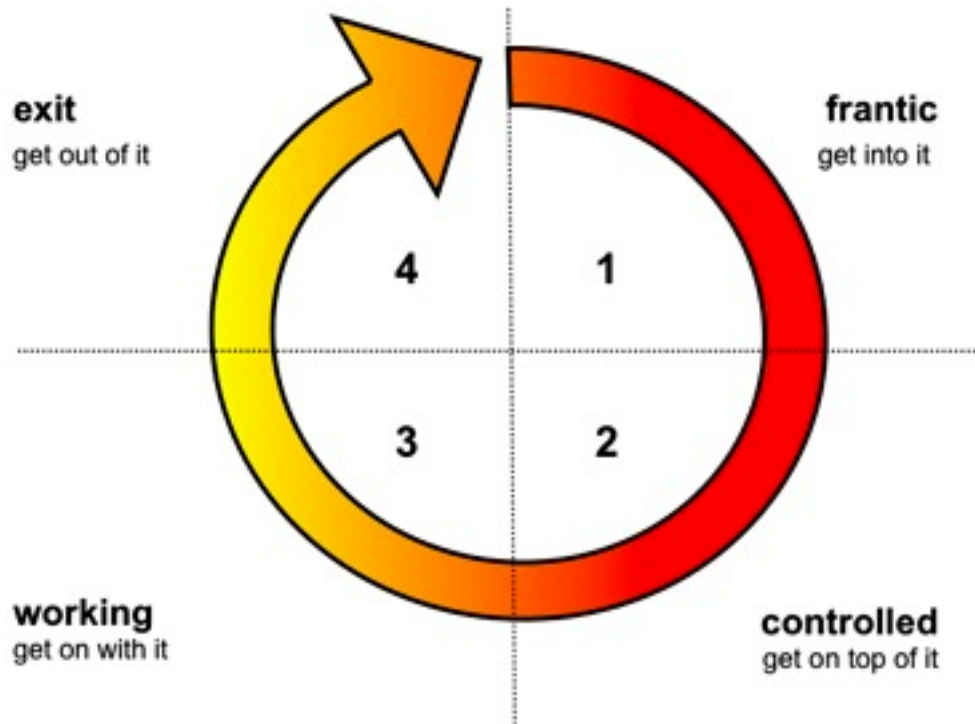
The working stage becomes a pretty low risk time and there is not a lot of feeling or emotion attached to it compared to what you have been through to get to this point in time. The working stage in crisis management is often the point in time when all the media attention is gone, the whole song and dance routine about the response has died down and a lot of the work has not only lost its glamour but become quite monotonous.

The energy levels rise once again as you leave the working stage. As we leave this third stage, we prepare to leave behind the death and destruction. At the beginning it seemed an impossible task and a month long deployment was about a month too long. Now the time has flown, the time has come to prepare to leave in a very physical way and return home. This **exit** stage might be just the end for you or it might be the end of the operation. Whatever the situation there needs to be some

planning around how you exit your deployment.

The four stages commencing with the frantic energy through to our exit are just a journey through the four sectors of the **Crisis Clock**. The Crisis Clock, as shown in Diagram 1, is applicable to any situation which has a start and an end to it and the delineation of the sectors will be clearer with the more emotion that exists around the project.

Diagram 1 - Crisis Clock



Stage 1

Frantic stage – “get into it”

In crisis management, the crisis clock starts ticking at the immediate point in time that the event leading to the crisis unfolds. In the case of the Bali bombings the clock starts the minute the bomb goes off. The offenders start to make their way to safety, witnesses will leave the scene seeking comfort that is only obtainable with distance – distance between them and the scene of the bombing. As they leave so does vital evidence, the further it goes the harder it is to track down. As the subsequent fires burn within the premises, they too are making the investigation which will follow more difficult.

The clock continues to tick but ground is being lost, we haven't even received the calls to respond yet, but evidence is leaving the scene.

The clock continues to tick

It is at this point in time when the calls start to go out, and we begin to gain a perception of the enormity of the situation.

The events in Thailand following the Boxing Day tsunami were no different. The clock really started ticking when the series of waves brought the water back in with ferocity. This was the point in time when thousands of victims would be swept from their feet, ultimately to their deaths.

I remember a conversation with one of the Australian embassy officials who was in Bangkok at the time of the Tsunami. He told me how the initial call they received advised them of a wave that may have resulted in the death of a 'few' beachgoers. As a popular holiday destination for Australians, it might be in the interest of the embassy official to have some representation down in Phuket. Has there been a greater underestimation of the size of an event before?

The impact of the ticking clock in Thailand was the decomposition of the many thousands of victims who littered the most affected areas. As the clock ticked and the bodies decomposed that would make the identification of the victims all the more problematic and challenging.

The clock ticked in Thailand for several days before the Australians could deploy to the most affected areas and commence the gruesome task of identifying the thousands of bodies.

Be it Bali or Thailand the response into a foreign country brings with it a lot of emotion. The emotion builds with the anticipation of what lays ahead. There are always stories of what has occurred but nothing ever prepares you for what you will see, hear, smell and touch in these devastated areas.

The anticipation in these events is built due to the time it takes to get to the destination. There is always a lot of time to sit and think, there is plenty of talk, but that is nervous talk seldom with any meaning.

And whilst the journey to the scene continues the clock ticks.....

When you finally arrive in the country, you know that you are about to go to work. You know that you are in this situation because you are good at what you do and that is why you have been handpicked to respond to an international disaster. But now the time has arrived to go to work. It's time to put the training and the years of work to use and do what you do best.

The pent up emotion at the start of a response to an event like this sees the staff working incredibly long hours and they do it willingly. A challenge for the leaders is to harness the energy and ensure that there will be enough fuel in the tank to get up each day and continue responding until either the project comes to an end or the staff are relieved by other incoming teams.

Obviously for responses to Thailand and Bali, the job goes on for months and in the case of Thailand years.

Whipping up the emotion of the staff (just in case the enormity of the event was insufficient) is the presence of the media. For an event like Thailand and Bali their appetite is insatiable. Everything that is done in those frantic weeks is captured on film and sent via satellite around the world.

The response in the first couple of frantic weeks is one of initially responding to what is completely obvious and needs to be done immediately. It involves a consideration of the task at hand and what kind of resources are going to be required to get the job done. It is a time for scoping the project, identifying the size and extent of the response required.

The difference in responding to a crisis as opposed to a planned project is the planning prior to the commencement of the event. In the area of crisis management we undertake contingency planning, but due to the unpredictability of disaster work that contingency planning is always limited.

Prior to seeing that haunting images on television of the planes crashing into the twin towers on 9/11, who could have ever imagined something as tragic as that really occurring. Surely it was beyond even the imagination of Hollywood movie directors.

What about the timing and location of the Tsunami?

One of the somewhat comical events in the first days of the response to Thailand by the Nordic teams was them unpacking their rapid response gear prepared as part of their contingency planning, to find they all had sub zero rated thermal snow clothing. It didn't really get a lot of use in the 45 degree heat of Thailand.

The three essential keys to help you firstly survive and then move out of the Frantic sector are;

1. Look after yourself and your mates

The response in the first number of weeks to any major crisis often sees those involved work extraordinary hours and achieve extraordinary results.

Such accomplishments come at a price.

People will routinely work between 16 and 18 hour days. This is ok for a couple of days, but when you return home after a four week rotation and realise that you maintained these hours for the entire duration, it often comes as a surprise, if not a shock.

I remember working in Thailand and travelling many hours in between meetings. At one point I commented to a colleague that I felt hungry. We thought about that for a moment and realised that it was almost lunchtime and that we were hungry because we had skipped breakfast that morning, missed dinner the evening before because we worked so late and when we both returned to our rooms, sleep won the debate over room service. We could always eat, but sleep was a precious commodity and something you took whenever you got the chance. After reflecting for a little longer, we then realised we had skipped lunch the previous day as well. So in the physically demanding environment in which we were working we had gone 24hours with only water.

Looking back on the tour after I returned home and struggled physically to recover, I realized that we had gone over 24 hours without eating not just once, but twice!

Obviously when asking so much of your body, both emotionally and physically you need to put fuel in. You can't just take it out and expect to keep going.

So point one is somebody has to be looking out for the workers.

2. Assess the boundaries – Scope the Project

One of the first things that we do as a forensic investigator when responding to the scene of a crime or incident is to assess the boundaries.

What we look at is “does all the potential evidence fall within the area identified as the crime scene?” Before we start any type of response to the processing of the scene we need to be sure the boundaries are big enough and that nothing will be left out or overlooked.

Once we have established the size of the scene, be it for something the size of the Bali bombings or a homicide confined to a house, then we can plan the response and identify the resources that will be needed.

Within this stage of a crisis the team is transitioning from a position of reactive “emergency response” to one of proactive consideration. At this point, it is time to consider the longer term needs and establish a management team. They will then put in place a mechanism for how the ongoing response will be managed.

At this point in a crisis, the most immediate needs are identified and prioritised.

The type of thing that was considered in Thailand during this phase was securing, or in the case of the mortuaries building, suitable accommodation that was appropriate to our very specific needs. The immediate needs included placing the 3500 bodies that lay within the grounds of an open air temple into body bags and then somehow slowing the rapid decomposition brought on due to the excessive heat.

Wat Yan Yao, the site of the mortuary, had to be transformed from a very sacred temple run by the Buddhist monks, into a functioning mortuary. For the most obvious reasons here, time was of the essence.

So when you scope a project in times of crisis, don't deliberate too long, because the clock is ticking.....

3. Deploy your resources – but stay in touch

After identifying what needs to be done, the next thing to do is send people to do it.

One of the situations to arise in Thailand was the deployment of international resources to Phuket. At the height of the response there was approximately 400 police and other specialists from 36 countries who all traveled to Thailand with the same intent – they had skills and wanted to help. Some came to help identify their own lost nationals and others just came to help.

There is an obligation upon those charged with the responsibility of deploying resources, to ensure that there is an appropriate skill set present to undertake the tasks required.

An effective way of ensuring that resources are appropriately deployed and subsequently being utilised to implement the goals of the organisation is through regular, effective communication.

In disaster management, the frequency and form of communication will depend upon where the crisis sits within the crisis clock and the size of the disaster.

The communication strategy during the Waterfall train derailment, in which seven people were killed, was very different to that which was employed during the Tsunami response. During the Waterfall response, the communication strategy for dealing with the deployment of staff from the many agencies present at the scene consisted of hourly meetings held on site within the shadows of the overturned carriages. This was in contrast to the meetings of the various stakeholders in the Tsunami effort. The meetings in Thailand were held on a daily basis and usually lasted between one and two hours. The meetings were held in an office many hours drive from the actual site.

No matter the size of the project or operation, an essential element during its life, but particularly during the frantic stage is to communicate regularly and effectively. When the meetings start getting a lot shorter in duration this is usually a sign you are starting to pass from the frantic stage into the controlled stage.

Stage 2

controlled stage – “get on top of it”

In the Frantic stage the efforts are concentrated on just getting into the work that is required to be done. And as we saw the clock starts ticking long before any response can occur, hence the frantic nature of the first response.

The second stage of the crisis clock is where structure and organisation takes place.

We see people start to settle into their roles. They turn up for work each day and are clear about what needs to be done. A lot of individuals, no matter how well trained and experienced, when invited to respond to an event such as Thailand or Bali, will have some degree of uncertainty about their ability to perform in an international environment. Turning up to such a large scale event, particularly after the first rotation has taken place, incoming team members are confronted by others who have been there for some time, who now possess knowledge of the local practice and procedures and who have an air of confidence that has come from merely performing a role for some time. When the new teams arrive many will question their ability based upon the confidence of the team members present. Little does the incoming team realise that the current team who are now so certain and possess such confidence, were also filled with a level of uncertainty when they first arrived on the scene.

It is in the controlled stage of a team member’s rotation that they develop confidence in their ability and when they begin to acknowledge that they do in fact possess the appropriate skills and expertise required to mix it on the international front. It is the controlled stage when the operation and the team members put order around their day and develop the confidence to make necessary decisions and leave their own mark on the operation.

A clear symbol of the movement out of frantic and into the controlled stage is when the hours worked start to reduce.

In Thailand, the controlled stage was marked by team members bringing their day back to a more respectable fourteen hour day and taking one day a week off to revive their flagging energy levels.

The change in the hours worked is a necessity. People can sustain the frantic workload whilst in the emergency response phase, but beyond that it becomes detrimental to the workers and ultimately the project as well.

As with the Frantic stage, within the Controlled stage there are three elements which will allow you to continue moving forward.

1. Plan response and duration

The planning that occurs during this phase of the operation is longer term and moves beyond the deployment of staff and into a strategic level.

Typically this is the stage when business plans will be written, budgets will be identified and staffing forecasts will occur.

Part of the staffing forecasts is the development of position descriptions. These enable management to match the appropriate people with appropriate skill sets to the position within the structure. In the frantic stage everybody will do anything to get the job done. Longer term though, this is inefficient. By the controlled stage in Thailand, it wasn't the best use of our resources to have forensic pathologists moving bodies, or senior DNA biologists labeling exhibits.

You want to have the right people doing the right jobs.

Crisis management staff typically vacate permanent positions within their home jurisdictions in order to respond to a disaster. This can have a huge impact on their home jurisdiction which needs to be assessed and managed as part of the project or disaster plan.

There is an incredibly small percentage of staff working full time in the area of Disaster Victim Identification. Thankfully, there just isn't the volume of work to justify that. The vast majority of staff deployed to Thailand as part of the DVI team, work within the forensic field of crime scene investigation in their home jurisdictions. Unfortunately, the presence of a disaster in one part of the world doesn't diminish the workload in home jurisdictions – as the saying goes "life goes on".

Deploying staff to a disaster or Bali means that for the duration of their deployment they are no longer able to contribute on the home front, which adds pressure to staff left to cover for their missing counterpart and may also increase wage costs for the home jurisdiction if overtime and cancelled leave become necessary to cover the workload.

For jurisdictions to support an operation such as Thailand or Bali they want to know how long they will be required to assist in releasing staff. The answer to this and many other

questions is the responsibility of the management team running the crisis response. They address these issues by forecasting the duration of the event and the staffing implications. This is achieved by accurate work performance measures and detailed analysis of the work to be done.

2. Process the scene – implement!

The first element within the controlled stage looks at the strategic direction of the response and how the resources, human and otherwise, will be secured. Whilst this is occurring there is also another operation running in parallel. That is what is referred in a forensic sense as the processing of the scene. It is the time when the initial planning has taken place, there are enough people there to do the job and its time to do the work that everyone is there to do.

At a crime scene this is the point when the planning stops and the doing commences. We enter the scene and start to process, identify and collect the forensic evidence which will provide answers.

During the controlled stage, people know who sits in key positions and are clear about the organisational structure of the operation.

People will have the time to document procedures for those coming in to follow.

There is time to give consideration to reviewing the work practices and implementing changes as required to ensure “best practice” procedures are in place.

A lot of the work that has been done to this point in time would normally be done in a planned project prior to the commencement. This stage of the operation becomes very business like and it’s about getting stuck into it.

3. Gainful employment for all.

A challenge for the management team in Thailand was the allocation of resources to the areas of most needs. Once the needs had been met a further, and at times more pressing need, was to ensure that all the international police and other specialists were gainfully employed.

As the crisis clock continues to tick it moves through stages and the change in stages is not always as obvious. This becomes prevalent in the transition from the controlled to the working stage.

In the initial frantic times people are more than willing to support the project. The support comes in many forms and from many different levels.

In Disaster Management, this means that the highest levels of Government offer their unquestionable support to the project and those working at the coal face. In Thailand and in Bali, we heard a lot of “whatever you need will be provided.”

But there is a change in time when, quite justifiably, questions start to be asked from the home jurisdiction. They now want to know what they are getting for their money, what their staff are doing and for how long will they be required to do it.

Thailand saw the arrival of hundreds of police and other specialists to help, many of these people ‘self deployed’, meaning that they simply arrived in the country and offered their support. A most well intended gesture but sometimes not what was required. Everybody wants to be there in the initial stages, but most often what is required is the staged roll out of help.

It is during the controlled stage of the operation that many staff will be released from an operation as the initial emergency response mode comes to an end and the skill set required changes.

As well as being important from a costing perspective, in the changing face of the operation it is very important to manage personnel resources in a way that ensures all staff feel that they are contributing in a meaningful way to the operation. The worst kind of publicity that an operation can receive is when staff return to their home jurisdiction and complain that they didn’t have enough to do. This is particularly damaging when you have the management team seeking the ongoing support for countries in the way of staff and money alike.

Stage 3

Working stage – “get on with it”

The working stage of any project or operation can be the least productive and yet the most challenging. The reason is positional. Whether the project or operation is one which has its conclusion in a matter of days such as the Waterfall train derailment or one such as the Tsunami DVI response, there will always be a flat spot and the working sector is where that occurs.

My memory of seeing this occur, and feeling it within myself, is very clear during the Waterfall train derailment, subsequent forensic investigation and the body recovery operation that occurred at the site. I had arrived at the site shortly after 8am in the morning and at the time of arrival the scene was one of immense activity. Injured commuters were being pulled from the wreckage and rescue personnel worked feverishly to get the injured from the scene to ambulances waiting at the top of the steep embankment. As the hours passed the scene turned from one of rescue to that of body recovery and then to the investigation of the cause of the derailment.

The rescue personnel were replaced at the scene with forensic investigators who would piece together the wreckage to determine the cause of the derailment. The work of the forensic staff went over many hours, through the process of recovering the bodies and the righting of the carriages. The working stage of the crisis clock kicked in for the staff from around 2am in the morning and lasted till about 8am which was then some 24 hours after our arrival.

Evidence of the presence of the working stage was the movements of the staff or to be more precise the lack of it. I can clearly see the forensic investigators sitting on the seats that had been pulled or thrown from the carriages on the side of the railway line. The staff were physically exhausted, mentally tired and were typically passing through the working stage, where they were tired of doing what that had been doing. The adrenalin was gone and so was much of the enthusiasm for their roles.

So when the team appears to be stuck within what is clearly the working stage of the crisis clock, how do we move out of that?

Once again I believe there are three key elements and they are;

1. Manage the energy

The energy will dip in anything that you do and no matter how good, exciting, challenging or frightening it feels, you eventually become somewhat insensitive to the feelings that it created at the commencement.

It doesn't mean that the very thing that created those feelings has changed, but more so reflects that you have developed a strategy for dealing with it and in most times that will be a sub-conscious strategy.

As a leader of a group of people who is responsible for the project, operation or the team on a rotation, it is my belief that the leaders are ultimately accountable for managing the energy of the team.

How does this occur?

Firstly there needs to be an acknowledgment of the stage on the crisis clock at which people or the project are at.

Managing the energy involves recognising that there will be an energy shift, accepting that it is going to occur and then dealing with it according to the circumstances of the project. Take into account project duration, opportunities available to you and the needs of the project.

There will be some circumstances such where the leader will recognise the stage the team is at and there will be very little that can be done about it. This was the case at the Waterfall train derailment. But you can always do something to manage the energy. At Waterfall, I spoke with the team as a group and individually. I ensured that they were all adequately fed and watered and that each member of the team had spoken with their loved ones by phone at some time during the day.

For longer projects such as the Tsunami rotations, where staff were working for a month at time in pretty trying conditions I had more time to manage the team through the energy dip and help them to continue working in a productive way.

Despite the duration of the project or operation, the one constant is that when the team was formed and each individual entered the frantic stage, their energy levels were up, they were driven and had clarity around what they wanted to achieve and how they wanted to contribute.

During the working stage when energy levels are low, it is at this point in time that the leader needs to bring people back to the reason why they are on the project. Recognition about the work that has been done, commitment towards the work that needs to be done and a revisit to what makes people do what they do, is vital.

2. Develop an Exit Strategy

Following the working stage on the crisis clock is the exit stage and this is when either the project will wind up due to completion or the rotation of a team will come to an end.

Developing how you will exit and leave the project can be just as important as the work that has been undertaken.

The development of the exit strategy needs to occur prior to entering the exit stage so that those who are taking over can prepare themselves for the handover.

Part of the exit strategy for each of the teams leaving Thailand was that there had to be an incoming team. This equates to succession plans which many businesses have in place today to ensure smooth running of their organization regardless of any change in team members.

One point worthy of note here is that during the initial emergency response and frantic stage, teams were given literally hours notice to get themselves onto a plane for Thailand. This then expanded out to days and towards the end of the operation, people had weeks to prepare themselves. This then also allowed for plans to be made to fill positions which are going to be left vacant in the home jurisdiction resulting in minimal disruption to the home jurisdiction and normal business. During the controlled and working stage, this type of succession planning becomes much more practical than during the initial frantic stage.

3. Report to Stakeholders

The working stage as we have seen provides challenges for all around motivation and managing energy levels.

The working stage also brings with it a period of relatively stabilised “quiet” in the operations.

It is during this period that the command team or those heading up the project should seize the opportunity of communicating with stakeholders.

There will always, always be the need to communicate with those who are funding the operation to inform them of how the operation is progressing, advise whether the project is on target, inform them of foreseeable wins and losses and of course, how the finances are tracking with regards to the forecasts that were projected.

For an operation such as Waterfall, this may consist of a detailed Sitrep (situation report) prepared and emailed from the site of the collision. For an operation such as Bali or Thailand obviously there is a whole lot more work that will go into a stakeholder communication report. Whatever form they take, these type of reports can be used to distil information to stakeholders to appease them.

An example of how such a document was used was during my last tour of Thailand in August 2005, at which time the operation was clearly in the working stage of the crisis clock. I prepared a detailed report for the Australian Federal Police outlining the current stage of the operation, the projected staffing needs for the next six months and the implications of withdrawing staff. This submission was used as part of the communication strategy with each of the Australian states who were supporting the Australian effort by supplying staff into the positions.

So it's important to think about the possible multiple uses of any communication report or documentation.

Stage 4

Exit stage – “get out of it ”

Exiting out of the project is not the end of the emotional attachment to a project or an operation for you or for others and the way in which you exit out of a project may be how you are remembered.

The journey through the various stages of the crisis clock can be an emotional one and exiting out of something that has had an emotional grip upon you can be a real challenge.

The significance and the impact of the exit will depend upon how long has been spent in the various other stages of the crisis clock and in particular, how long was spent in the frantic stage.

Once again the amount of emotional baggage that one will take away from an operation depends upon their time and emotional commitment within the operation. One of the real challenges for the police and other forensic specialists returning from a tour of duty in either Bali following the bombings or Thailand after the Tsunami is to re-enter and re-engage with pre tour life.

The reason that it becomes such a challenge is such tours of duty are not within the normal course of their expected way of life, or anyone else's way of life for that matter. Until the first Bali bombings in October of 2002, it was unheard of for New South Wales Police to tour on an international level in response to an operational need. Sure, there was the opportunity to attend the odd one-off study tours but the type of rotations undertaken firstly in response to Bali and then Thailand changed the face of forensic work for many state police in this country.

The tour of duty into an international area creates challenge that result from the type of work undertaken. Bali, which set the precedent for international deployments for state police, was the biggest loss of Australian life as a result of a criminal act in a non-wartime period. The Disaster Victim Identification work undertaken in Thailand following the Boxing Day Tsunami has been the world's largest ever DVI operation. Australian Police not only participated in these historical events, but led many of the key positions during the initial frantic stage and continued throughout the deployment.

The impact of working in such an environment is that those who have worked at such a high level come back and seek the same level of challenge and of course, they seek the level of satisfaction that goes with those challenges. However, nothing on a domestic level (thankfully) has to this

point in time offered the same challenge or professional stimulation. To this end the exiting out of the operation needs to be done effectively, not just for the continuity of the operation but also for those who have worked within the unique environment.

The three elements which make the exiting out of the operation effective are;

1. Implement exit strategy.

For reasons that we discussed in the working stage, the exit strategy needs to be developed earlier to allow for the effective rotation of staff when that is required. It is only during the exit stage though that the exit strategy is implemented.

The depth of the exit strategy will depend upon what happens to the project or operation. If it is the exit of a team whose tour of duty has come to an end and they are to be replaced by another incoming team, then as discussed earlier, the exit strategy will look more like a mini succession plan and will be very different to where an entire withdrawal occurs or the project comes to an end.

In the Thailand operation there have been many different types of exit strategies developed. Each team who completes their tour of duty is required to have an exit strategy. When one international team hands over the responsibility for an area of operation, they too require an exit strategy and when the entire international deployment withdrew from Thailand, they also needed an exit strategy.

The differences in the exit strategy are commensurate to the time in which team members have spent within the crisis clock.

The change in the emotional connection that team members and leaders will have at the end of an operation can, on occasions, be referred to as 'wind down mode'.

There is a need to acknowledge the change in the energy of team members as they come to the end of their tour or the project is coming to its end, but this can not be at the expense of an effectively implemented exit strategy.

2. Handover

This second element of the exit stage is very closely linked to that of the implementation of the exit strategy. No matter under what circumstances the project or operation comes to an end there needs to be an effective handover. This handover may be to an incoming team, it may

be to another organisation or it may be to the principal authority that were the auspice of the project.

During my tours of Thailand and Bali , as an incoming leader I experienced very different styles of handover. The effectiveness of these handovers impacted greatly upon how quickly I was able to move out of my own frantic stage. The worst possible handover was the one experienced in Bali. As the team and I were on a chartered bus from the International airport heading towards the hotel, another bus was en route from the hotel to the airport with the outgoing team. So to say this was the worse possible handover is not entirely correct because there was no handover.

This is in contrast to the handover in Thailand when the outgoing Australian DVI Commander spent two days ensuring I was across as much of the information as I could be prior to taking over the role.

A handover at the end of an operation or project such as when the international team withdrew from Thailand is something that needs to be worked towards and takes a significant amount of planning. In the case of Thailand, the operations which had been begun by the international policing community were to eventually be handed over to the Thai authorities in order that they could complete the identification process. The most effective way of handing over the operation and ensuring there was continuity of the roles was to have our Thai counterparts shadow their international colleagues in the roles they were performing. This allowed for a gradual and staged handover ensuring the all important continuity of roles existed.

3. Debrief and Acknowledgement

The three elements of the exit stage are all very closely linked and reliant upon each other for a successful exit. The debrief and acknowledgement is again something that occurs on an individual level and for the entire operation.

The debrief for the individuals is about providing them with a strategy for dealing with the feelings that come upon returning to domestic issues. My experiences and observations

have been that almost all will experience these challenges of finding the passion in what they were doing prior to engaging in such challenging events. What I have also learnt is that most will come out the other side ok and be able to reintegrate effectively if they are given the time and are allowed to experience and feel their feelings without being forced to reintegrate too early.

Part of the debrief for individuals requires a period of acknowledgement for the work that has been undertaken and the importance of it to so many. The acknowledgement can be self acknowledgement or it can be at an organisational level or a combination of both.

A debrief held at the conclusion of the project or operation can cover a welfare debrief and also an operational review of practice and procedures reviewing what worked well and what could be done differently. A very important part of this process is to then actually take what comes out of the debrief and ensure the lessons learnt are not lost. This is a time for documenting and recording intellectual property developed during the course of the project, in order that it can be pulled out and used again during the frantic stage of another similar project in the future.

As would have become clear working through the various stages of the crisis clock and the essential elements that help transition from one stage to the other, the crisis clock applies to individuals within a project and the project or operation itself.

A crisis clock will apply for an operation lasting for around 30 hours or so such as the time spent at the scene of the Waterfall train derailment and it will also apply for an operation such as the Tsunami response in Thailand that extended over 12 months.

The stages of the crisis clock are transitional without a clear ending of one stage and the commencement of the other. As the colours of the clock merge, so do the stages and the emotion surrounding the different stages.

Whether you are an experienced leader managing projects in times of disaster, or whether you are a junior team member working on your very first project, I hope, through my e-book and the crisis clock, that you are now more aware of the stages that you and others will experience during the life of a project. I know that for myself, recognising the emotions and patterns of behaviour in each stage of a crisis, makes managing major disasters much less daunting which is all part of [Leadership Matters!](#)