



Management



Advancing Professional Rescue

Leadership >>>

The command of operational incidents is different from managing a controlled and defined workplace scenario, mainly because of the diverse environments and small influxes of high pressure that operational incidents bring. At any incident, including a Road Traffic Collision, an Incident Commander needs to take control from the outset with authority while remaining calm, clear and decisive. Resolving an incident effectively and safely requires the incident commander to be active in command and assertive when taking control. They need to ensure risks are identified and managed, and the information is gathered to develop a tactical plan. Supporting their tactical plan; sufficient resources needed to be made available and deployed effectively. Progress then needs to be monitored against the plans and where necessary adjustments made to bring the incident to a conclusion.

To successfully achieve these outcomes an incident commander needs to be assertive and sufficient to enable the coordination and control of a multi-discipline response in a high-pressure situation. Being assertive and active requires many personal qualities and attributes that are developed through training, and experience.

Firstly, to maximise team performance incident commanders need to be self-aware. A leader who is cognisant of their behaviours recognises that their actions impact on the behaviours of the people they are leading. A good leader adapts their behaviours when necessary to manage perceptions and influence the actions of others. A confident Commander also influences a team performance, conversely, team members detect negative behaviours such as panic, insecurity or uncertainty. In both cases, it affects how a team respond to the situation and a commander's instructions. Displaying and instilling confidence makes personnel less anxious, reduces stress and increases team performance. Complimenting self-awareness and confidence, an incident commander must also have sound situational awareness. That they have a perception and understanding of the circumstances they face.

Active situational awareness ensures that the interpretation reflects the actual circumstances. This is critical for making appropriate decisions and predicting the likely effects of activities. Resolving an incident involves the efforts of many people and multiple teams. This might include some fire and rescue service personnel as well as other agencies. For any team to work effectively, they needed to have a standard interpretation of events and shared situational awareness. Incident commanders should be aware that a dynamic environment can lead team members to form different impressions of the incident. This can happen without teams being cognisant of it. It can cause conflict and make it more challenging to make decisions.

Team members interpret information in a way based on their training and previous experiences. A team with shared situational awareness has a similar knowledge of the status of the goals they are working towards. This aligned understanding extends to the objectives and progress of other team members concerning the operational plan. They should also have a combined understanding of how their actions may affect others and the goals they are trying to achieve.

A commander's awareness of an incident is made up of many sources of information that are interpreted into a coherent picture, the basis of which is formed from:

- Assessing risk and making decisions
- Identifying and prioritising objectives
- Developing an incident tactical plan
- Anticipating how an incident develops
- Predicting the consequences of actions.

To obtain and disseminate information through these sources, the incident commander must also have effective communication skills, which we look at in the Communication module. They must also be able to lead, direct and instruct others. To do such, at a Road Traffic Collision an Incident Commander must 'position' themselves correctly, ensuring the ability to observe the full incident, yet closely scrutinise the scene of operations. By adopting an appropriate leadership, style commander can influence the response from others. Some situations require a more authoritative style of leadership, while others may permit a style with greater interaction.

An effective leader is aware of the way in which these styles are likely to influence people. They should adopt the appropriate one for the given situation. Equally, others at an incident should understand that a leader may need to vary their style to achieve the best outcome. A commander's leadership style must also be backed up with Sound judgment, which supports effective decisions. Sound judgement is based upon an objective evaluation of the facts. Commanders must be careful to ensure their emotions, assumptions, expectations, opinions and personal biases do not affect their objectivity.

Sound judgment requires that the incident commander is fully informed, at a Road Traffic Collision this means obtaining information about the environment, the vehicles and the casualties. Failure to fully obtain all the information can lead to ineffective decisions which can have significant consequences. At a Road Traffic Collision, an Incident Commander needs these skills, to continually monitor safety, gather information, plan and lead others to bring the incident to a successful conclusion.

Summary >>>

- The leadership at an operational incident is different from those required in a defined workplace because of the diverse environments and small influxes of high pressure that operational incidents bring.
- An Incident Commander needs to take control from the outset with authority while remaining calm, clear and decisive.
- To achieve successful outcomes an incident commander needs to be assertive and active while remaining self-aware.
- A good leader adapts their behaviours when necessary to manage perceptions and influence the actions of others.
- An incident commander must also have sound situational awareness. This is critical for making appropriate decisions and predicting the likely effects of activities.
- A team with shared situational awareness has a similar knowledge of the status of the goals they are working towards.
- A commander's awareness of an incident is made up of many sources of information that are interpreted into a coherent picture.
- To obtain and disseminate information through these sources; the incident commander must also have effective communication skills, which is supported by proper positioning.
- A commander's leadership style must also be backed up with Sound judgment, which supports effective decisions.
- At a Road Traffic Collision, an Incident Commander needs these skills, to continually monitor safety, gather information, plan and lead others to bring the incident to a successful conclusion.