

Conducting Effective Table Tops, Drills and Exercises

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Here is the fan - there is the switch

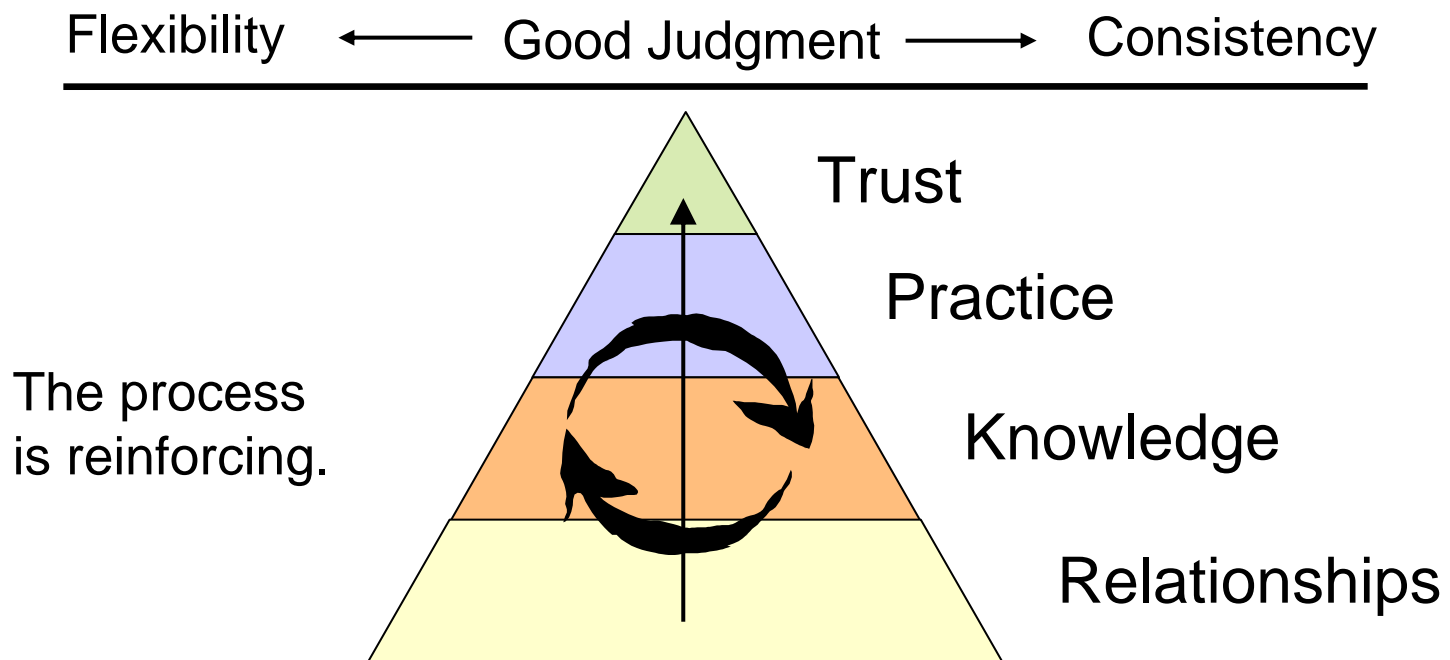
What is a Crisis?

- “An unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending, especially one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome” (Webster’s Ninth Collegiate Dictionary, 1987).
- “*Plans are worthless, but **planning is everything***. There is a very great distinction because when you are planning for an emergency you must start with this one thing: the very definition of 'emergency' is that it is unexpected, therefore it is not going to happen the way you are planning.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

One of the keys to effective emergency response in schools...

...is exercising the “balance” between flexibility and consistency that is only developed through solid relationships, knowledge, practice and trust.



Training and Exercises

- Training and exercises are **invaluable** tools for preparing staff and testing emergency plans.
- Training and exercises should **reinforce concepts in the school/school district emergency plan.**
- Training should be **conducted regularly** (Reality: *we do what we've practiced, not what is in the plan*)



Training for District and School Staff

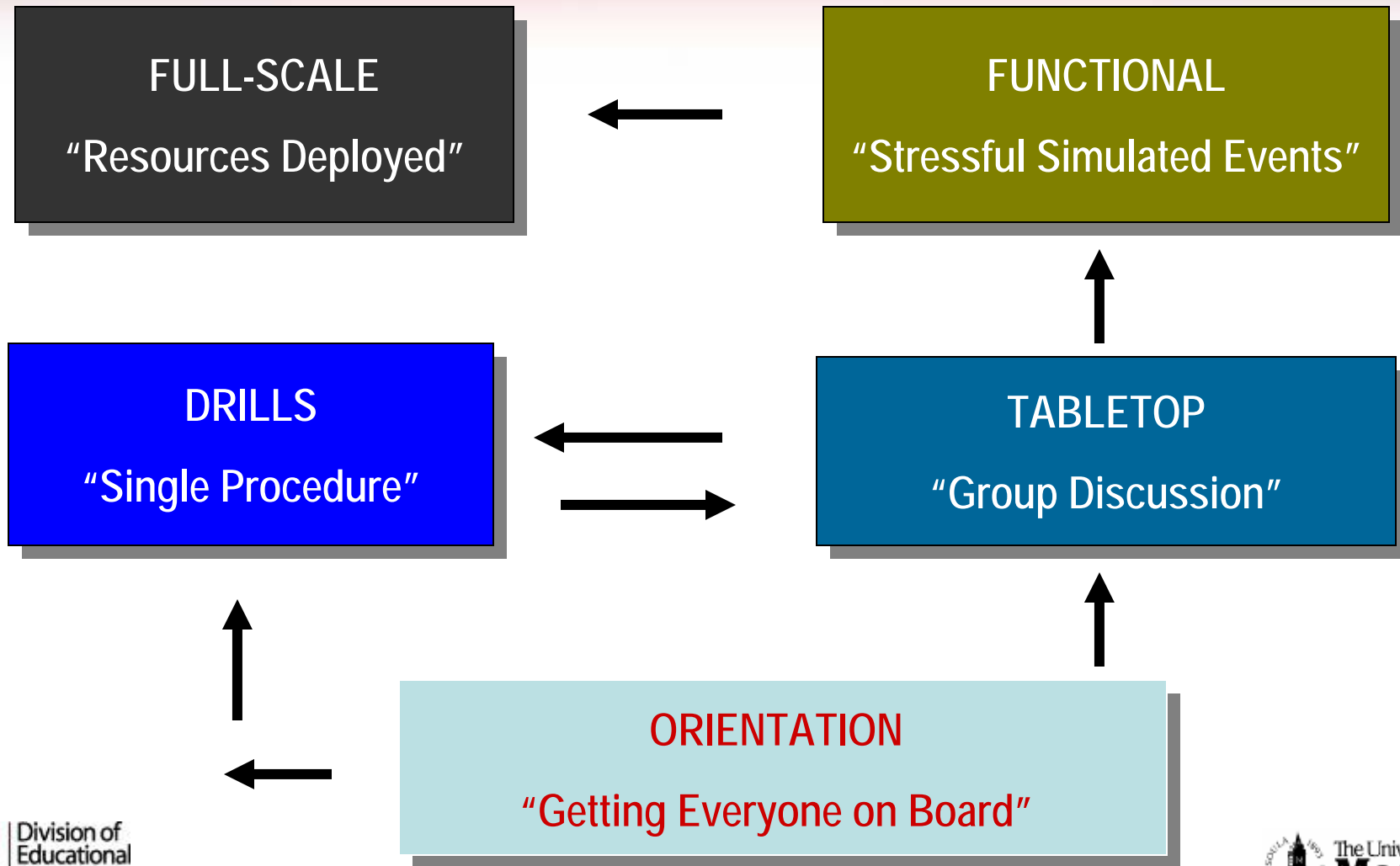
- **Train all staff** on emergency response procedures
- Provide additional training to personnel based upon their roles:
 - Incident command team
 - Bus drivers
 - Teachers, substitutes
 - Facility managers/maintenance staff
 - School/District Crisis Response team
 - Other non-instructional staff (food service workers, nurses, front office staff/secretaries, volunteers)
- **Train with community partners** as appropriate
- **Consider this a fundamental, consistent part of the school calendar**



Types of Exercises

- **Orientation Meetings:** Inform about emergency operations plans and emergency procedures (1-2 hours)
- **Drills:** Perfection of an individual emergency procedure (1/2 – 2 hrs)
- **Tabletops:** Identify roles and responsibilities in different scenarios (1-4 hours)
- **Functional Exercises:** Roundtable simulation of emergency situation with realistic timeline (3-8 hours)
- **Full-scale Exercises:** One-on-one simulation of an emergency situation with all resources deployed (1/2 – multiple days)

Types of Exercises



Main benefits of an exercise program:

- **Individual training:** Exercising enables people to practice their roles and gain experience in those roles.
- **System improvement:** Exercising improves the school / district's "system" for managing emergencies.



Through exercises, schools can:

- **Test** and evaluate **plans**, policies, and procedures
- **Reveal** planning **weaknesses**
- Reveal gaps in resources
- **Improve** organizational **coordination** and **communications**
- **Clarify roles** and responsibilities
- **Train personnel** in roles and responsibilities
- **Improve** individual **performance**
- **Gain** program recognition and **support** of officials
- **Satisfy regulatory requirements**



Conducting Exercises

- **Practice** a variety of **different scenarios** based upon risks in the school and community.
 - Utilize hazard / vulnerability data
 - Collaborate with Disaster and Emergency Services
- **Practice** a variety of **different response procedures**, such as lockdown, shelter-in-place, evacuation.
- **Communicate information in advance** (with parents, media and surrounding neighborhoods as appropriate).
- Evaluate and **document lessons learned** in an after-action report.
- **Test** capacities of **all agencies** – not just schools
- **Drill** under **different conditions**.
- Identify weaknesses / continuous improvement – but design succession of exercises to **instill feelings of “success”**

Why Orientation Sessions?

- **Discuss** a critical topic or problem in a group setting
- **Introduce** something new (e.g., policies and plans, ICS, EOC)
- **Explain** existing plans to new people (e.g., newly hired school staff who need an explanation of the EOP, ICS etc.,.)
- Introduce a cycle of exercises or preparing participants for success in more complex exercises
- **Motivate** people for participation in subsequent exercises
- Identify the critics and, if appropriate, involve them
- Emphasize emergency management link to school mission, \$\$, AYP and community responsibility

Why Conduct Drills?

- Its role in an exercise program is to **practice and perfect one small part of the response plan** and help prepare for more extensive exercises in which several functions will be coordinated and tested.
- The effectiveness of a drill is its focus on a single, relatively limited portion of the overall emergency management system.
- Drills can also be used to **provide training with new equipment**, to **develop new policies** or procedures, or to **practice** and maintain current skills.



After-Action Review

- **After-action reviews capture key lessons learned** from emergency response and make recommendations for improvements
- **Benefits of after-action reviews**
 - Supports proactive response management
 - Provides documentation for any future litigation
 - Identifies areas for improvement
- **After-action reviews must not be an after-thought!**

After-Action Review

- ◆ **Consideration must be made for the best time** for this – not necessarily *immediately* after! A skilled facilitator is important. Tension must be constructive.

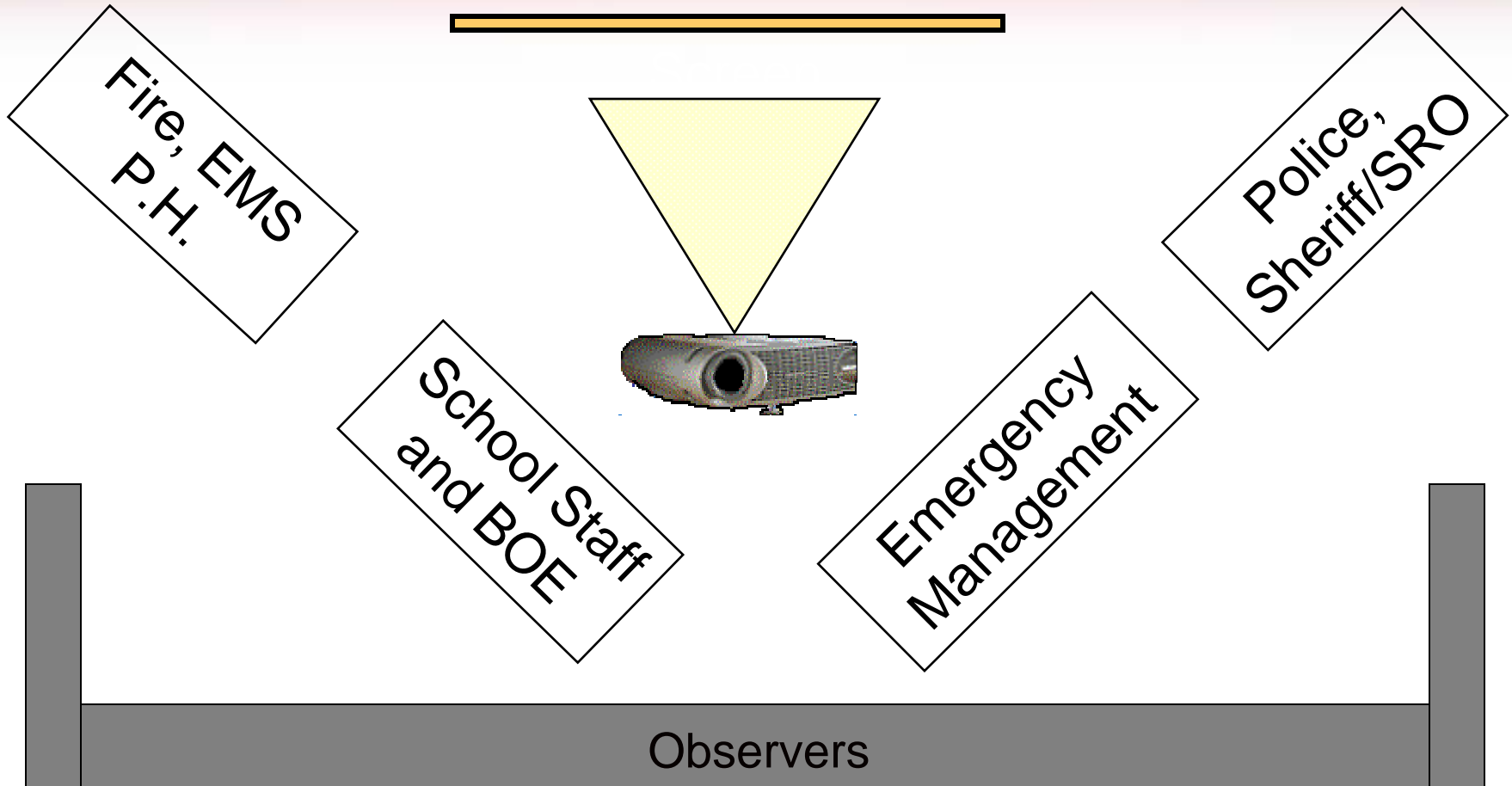
- ◆ **Components of after-action reviews:**
 - Exercise / emergency overview
 - Exercise goals and objectives
 - Analysis of outcomes
 - Analysis of capacity to perform critical tasks
 - Summary
 - Recommendations
 - Specific improvements for each partner
 - Accountability plan

Why Table Top Exercises?

- Lend themselves to **low-stress discussion** of coordination and policy within the school and/or between the school and other agencies
- Provide a good environment for **problem solving**.
- Provide an opportunity for key agencies and stakeholders to become **acquainted** with one another, their interrelated roles, and their respective responsibilities.
- Provide good **preparation for a functional exercise**.



Sample School Tabletop Room Layout



Why Functional Exercises?

- Makes it possible to test several functions and exercise several agencies or departments **without incurring the costs** of a full-scale exercise
- **Tests multiple functions** of the school / district's Emergency Management Plan
- Simulates an incident in the **most realistic manner** possible short of moving resources to an actual site
- Highly **interactive**, moderately stressful, requires quick decision making



Photo: City of Vancouver

Functional Exercise Roles:

Roles:

- **Controller:** Manages and directs the exercise
- **Players:** Participants who respond as they would in a real emergency (Players should include policy makers; may include coordinators and operational personnel directing field activities.)
- **Simulators:** Assume external roles and deliver planned messages to the players
- **Evaluators:** Observers who assess performance

Setup:

- People gather where they would actually operate in an emergency.
- Players and simulators are often seated in separate areas or rooms.
- Realism is achieved by the use of telephones, radios, televisions, and maps.
- Involves carefully scripted and timed messages/"interjects"

Why Full Scale Exercises?

- **Simulates a real event** as closely as possible.
- Effectively **evaluates the *operational* capability** of emergency management systems in a highly stressful environment that simulates actual response conditions.
- **Coordinates the actions** of several entities
- Tests several emergency functions
- **Activates the ICS / EOC**
- No better learning exercise
- Utilizes same personnel “roles” as functional exercise – but **now includes victims”**



Full Scale Exercises

- **May require 1 to 1½ years to develop** a comprehensive, full scale exercise
- Completing a logical sequence of the orientation sessions, drills, and functional exercises prior is key
- Critical to **involve media and parents** on scene
- Capstone event, but **must be more than a one time event.**



More Information:

- ERCM Training and Technical Assistance Center: www.ercm.org
- Georgia Office of Homeland Security / Exercise Development Guide: www.gema.state.ga.us
- Department of Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP):
<http://www.hseep.dhs.gov/>
- Please also utilize resources from FEMA's excellent, free online courses:
 - IS-120 "Introduction to Exercises"
<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is120.asp>
 - IS-139 "Exercise Design"
<http://www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/IS/is139.asp>

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THANK YOU

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