

Emergency Planning College Short Guide

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Crisis Leadership Part 3 Useful Tools

The Insight Team
Emergency Planning College

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- Helen Hinds
- Beverley Griffiths
- Alan Bravey
- Tom Knox

Crisis Leadership

Part 3 Useful Tools

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The aim of this series is laid out in the notes supporting the title slide of Part 1: Key Concepts. Please read that to make sure you understand the purpose of this set of guides.

- **Part 1: Key Concepts covers the 9 most fundamental 'big ideas' about leadership in crises;**
- **Part 2: Core Functions details a functional approach to the job of crisis leadership, identifying and explaining the 12 most fundamental 'must do's';**
- **This is Part 3: Useful Tools**
- **Part 4: Staying Effective**

It details the tools that will help the crisis leader decide about the situation, the required direction (strategy) and the actions to be carried out.

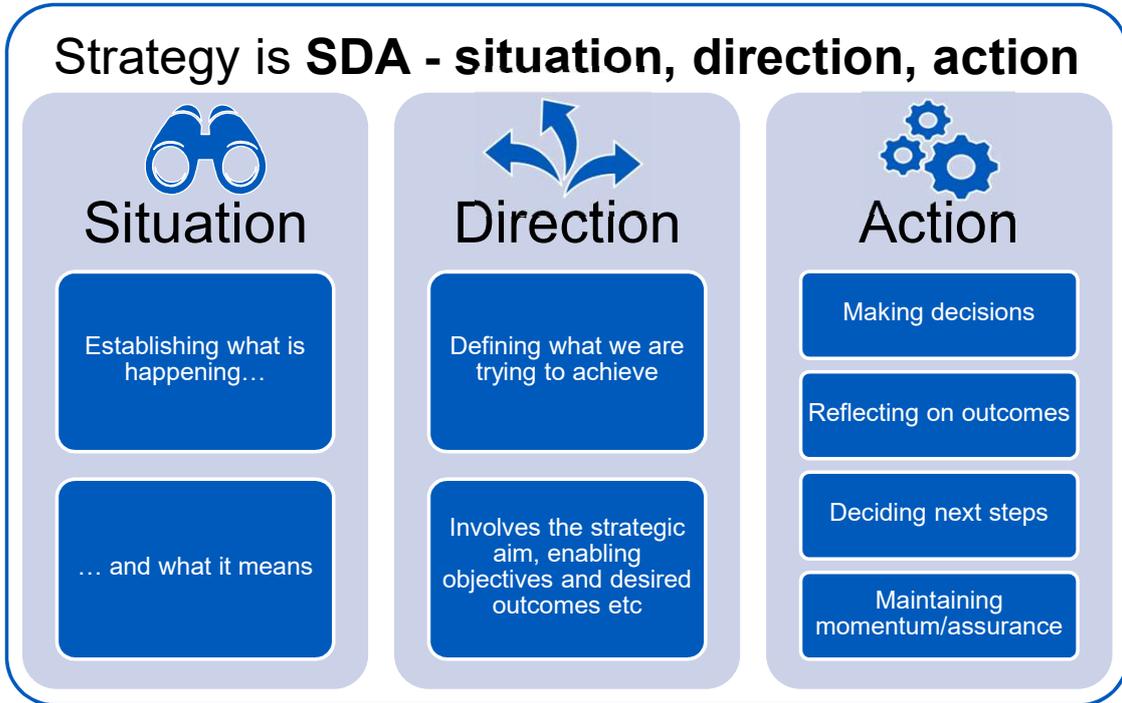
We think of this as a tool-box. The aim is to pick the right tool for the job from a readily-available and familiar set that you know how to handle – exactly as you size up a job, decide which tool you need and reach in for where you know it is in the tool-box. So the metaphor works quite well! It doesn't necessarily imply that all of these tools should be used during any particular phase of a crisis, but we do think the first four are essential.

How the Tools are Organised:

- Tool 1 gives 'strategy' a short, practical and functional definition – and a way of understanding and then shaping its component parts.
- Tool 2 begins the process of understanding the key elements of the situation. This is the first step to sense-making, or shared situational awareness.
- Tools 3-4 take understanding the situation a stage further. They are primarily about building, maintaining and articulating the detail of your shared situational awareness.

They can also be used to prompt continuous and critical reflection by the whole team. One reviewer has suggested that Tool 4 would make a good wall poster for display and reference in your crisis response centre.

- Tools 5-6 are about deconstructing issues, problems and risks, in order to flush out and understand all their nuances and contingent aspects. This can do much to reduce the likelihood of unintended consequences and, for that reason, they are quite powerful tools. As you can see, they would really benefit from varied expert input.
- Tools 7-8 are about confirmation and confidence – understanding the limits of your knowledge about the situation. If you don't know everything you think you need to know (!), these will at least help you confidently use what you do know for sure and what you believe you can rely on (for now).
- Tool 9 is the recommended decision-making model; we use the one associated with the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles – also known as the Joint Decision Model.
- Tool 10 is a safeguard or a critical thinking backstop – giving you a framework for the moments when you mentally pause and say “are we still thinking critically”?



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Crisis managers are strategic leaders, and all strategic leaders have to expect to have to manage a crisis at some point. So let's start by unravelling what 'strategic' means. This is not with a wordy or conceptual definition, but with a sense of what the core function and purpose of strategic leadership is.

To be useful, the answer should be something that helps you organise your mind on your way to the control room and that gets you over that "what should I do first?" moment. You will want to know where to start and what to do first, in order to get some sense of control and give people the leadership they need. SDA is a handrail which will guide to that place.

It should then guide you as to how to carry on from then on as well. We think that understanding strategy as meaning **situation, direction and action** is a really useful tool. None of the rest of the tools in this section are given in any particular order of priority - except this one. It is always first.

Tool 2: The Situation Scoping Tool

An easy way to consider the situation in terms of its wider context and severity...



Scale



Duration



Impact

How big?

Geography, how far might this thing extend

How long?

How long might this last, in terms of both acute, chronic and legacy impacts

Doing what to whom and where?

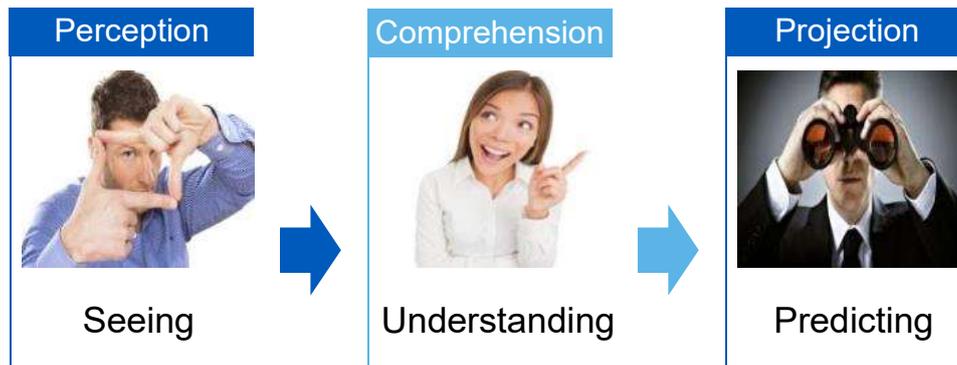
It is often easy to identify the immediate consequences, but tracing the wider impacts can be extremely difficult

This is very useful tool – not least because it can get you over that initial confusion about what is going on. It gives you something practical and useful to do almost immediately whilst you orient yourself to the situation and settle in.

It is also where the creation of strategic and shared situational awareness begins – with the 3 most basic things you need an answer to. It should be part of the information team's standard practice – so that they start working on these questions from the very start, and use them to shape their assessments and reports. So the first reports you receive could be usefully structured this way.

Tool 3: The Situational Awareness Tool

It has three elements...



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(Shared) situational awareness has become part of our vocabulary since the first joint interoperability guidance was published in 2013. In fact, the EPC was teaching it some time before that.

This tool is a useful reminder that situational awareness is much more than ‘knowing what is happening’; it must help you to interpret (establish meaning) and to foresee how the situation may change – and what effect that would have. So, the key points are:

- It’s predictive (at least potentially);
- It’s about ‘getting ahead’ of the problem;
- It’s very dynamic;
- It’s in the team members heads, but can be represented in a common operating picture;
- It’s a very flexible concept which (in the hands of those who understand it) applies equally well ‘over the car bonnet’ or in higher-level and bigger-picture considerations. At the crisis management team level it should focus on the wider, strategic, high-level issues and risks – not the operational detail.

This must be distilled into **shared** situational awareness. It doesn’t mean everybody knows everything, or that everybody knows the same things. It does mean that there is an agreed and accepted ‘take’ on what is happening, what it means and what it might mean. That then becomes the shared basis for decision-making. It is usually expressed in a report. COBR calls that the CRIP – or commonly recognised information picture. Others call it a common operating picture.

Tools 3 and 4 give, in turn, a basic framework for initial situational awareness and then a questioning technique for building the detail of it and adding dynamics.

Tool 4: The Persistent Questioning Tool



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Persistent questioning is a simple and powerful tool in creating situational awareness. You will see the link to critical thinking disciplines here; it requires probing, analysis, self-questioning and some lateral thinking – “what is not happening?”.

With practice, smart strategic thinkers can apply these tools like this very quickly or in more considered and slower fashion – as and when required by the nature or stage of the crisis. It’s all about flexibility, with good crisis leaders being the ones who can accommodate both fast-paced and more deliberative decision styles – and who know when and how to use both of them well.

At this point, you should reflect on the charge levelled at tools like these in some quarters – that they are too slow. There may be some truth in that at first. However, when performance is scrutinised after the event, there will be an expectation that as much rigour was brought into decision-making as was practicable at the time. Also, decisions might be more defensible after the event if it can be demonstrated that disciplined approaches were used to make the most of what was known at the time. Systematic and recordable analysis needs to be under way as soon as possible.

Tool 5: Problem Deconstruction – The Factors Tool



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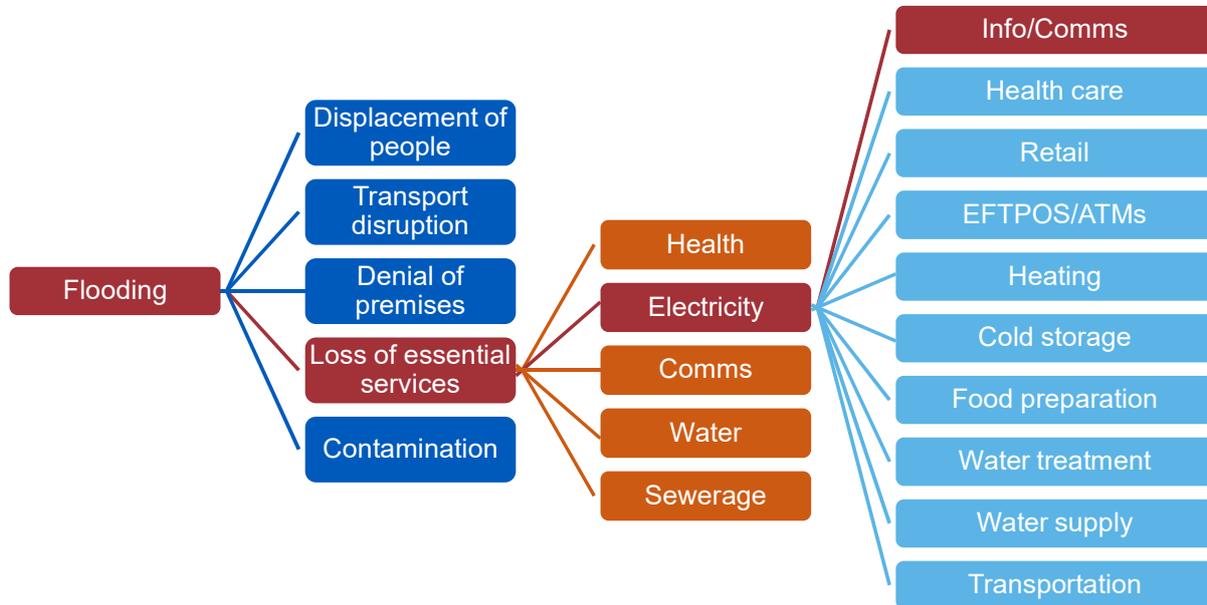
This is about deconstructing a complex issue by analysing its component factors, before recombining them into situational awareness.

We think there is definite merit in having collectively decided which tools to use. Common training and consistent process can then follow.

Critical thinking is about how to think and how to decide. If a tool brings rigour to your analysis and decision-making, and helps you get to good conclusions in a robust, defensible way – then it works.

We think this tool (like Tool 6) almost demands use by a multi-disciplinary team, so that various relevant expert views and interpretations come into play and inform the analysis.

Tool 6: Problem Deconstruction - The Impacts Tool



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This tool is usually very popular and very effective. Start on the left (with the basic risk type) and you can see that it teases out levels of effects – leading to a progressively more nuanced understanding of the impacts. The discipline is to take each first-order impact through the whole process to capture as many impacts as possible.

Impact trees can be used for informing your shared understanding of scale, duration and impact – which makes it a response tool - and for:

- Assessing risks (teasing out the foreseeable)
- Identifying planning assumptions (what you need to prepare for now or will have to deal with later);
- Planning for the next stage of your response itself, and;
- Scenario modelling for exercises.

As you can see – it is a multi-use and very effective tool. Regarding the ‘reasonably foreseeable’; we must encourage critical thinking here. Reasonably foreseeable means that which can be predicted following deliberate analysis (by means such as impact trees) – not just hunches and ‘educated guesses’.

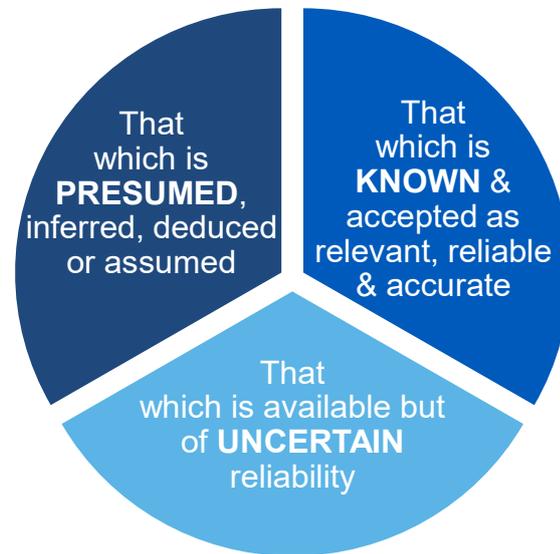
Again – this tool really comes alive in a multi-disciplinary team with various expert narratives.

Tool 7: The Knowledge Tool

In the first place, gets the 'facts' as right as possible with K,U & P analysis

Think in terms of 3 broad divisions. Be clear which is which.

...but what about the 'unknown unknowns'?



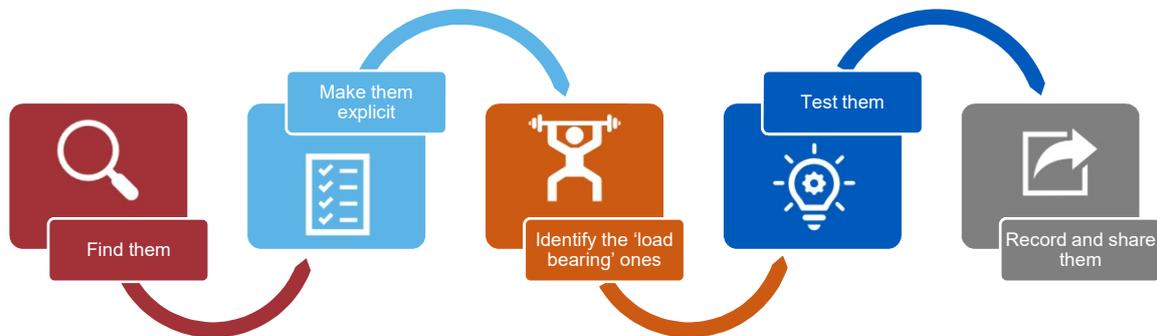
Decisions tend to be underpinned by a collection of things you know, things you believe (because you can safely infer them) and things you think might apply, but cannot yet be certain of. This is reality and a certain amount of tolerance for uncertainty is a requirement of good crisis leaders. However, without actually applying a bit of discipline to this, it can be difficult to be absolutely sure which element of information is in which category.

We suggest that it is vital that you understand exactly what you know, believe and are not sure about – and can articulate this in your recording of a decision. At the very least, be aware of which factors in your decision are potentially flawed.

There is a good quote on this theme, which is attributed to the US General Colin Powell... *"Tell me what you know. Tell me what you think. Tell me what you don't know. Be completely clear about which is which."*

We suggest this thought process is written down if possible; it's less easy to delude oneself in writing. The act of having to articulate thoughts and impressions 'on paper' is a powerful corrective to vague, incomplete or sloppy analysis.

Tool 8: The Assumptions Tool



You can't do without them. But you must understand them

You cannot eliminate assumptions from the decision-making process, but you can give them a good work-out. Know where they are, know how 'load-bearing' they are, test them when possible – and the chances are good that you will not be completely surprised when some of them fail!

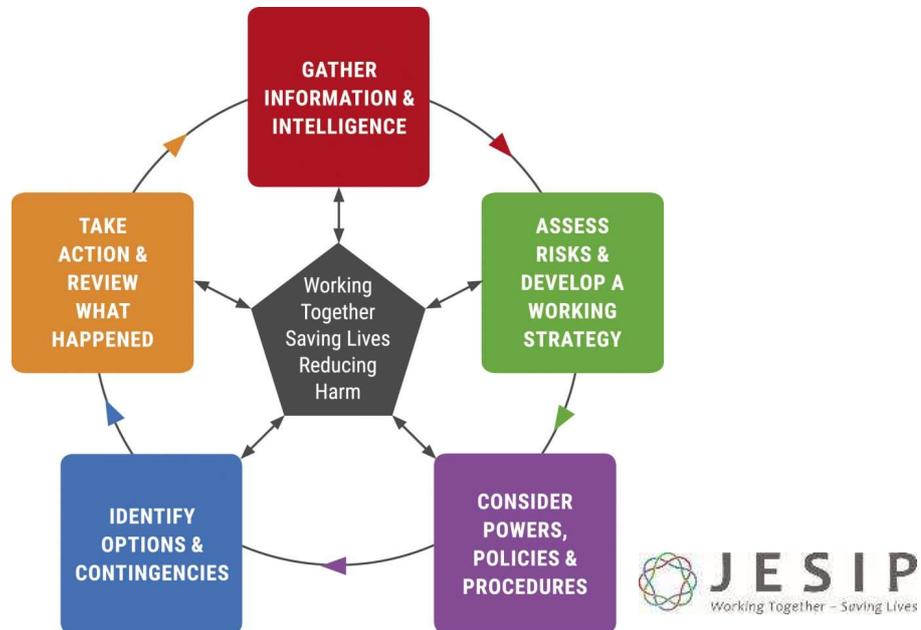
If possible - write them out, record them, check them, share them and accept them knowingly. Incorporate this understanding in your decision rationale. Sometimes entire plans hinge on a single assumption.

These short guides aren't really vehicles for case studies, but there is one that illustrates this point too nicely to leave out. The last major Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak (2001). The plan for it was written after the 1968 outbreak and followed the path of what happened then. At that time the meat industry was fairly localised. By 2001 the industry was distributed nationally, so the same animal could be born, raised and slaughtered in separate parts of the country.

So, the plan's out-of-date assumption was that there would be a single localised outbreak that needed to be contained quickly. When the outbreak was recognised in 2001, it was already in 57 different, widely-dispersed locations.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was completely wrong-footed and overwhelmed. The result was that it was taken off the case, the military sent in and the ministry was dismantled. So – reputation, brand and survival do matter to public service organisations – as well as private ones.

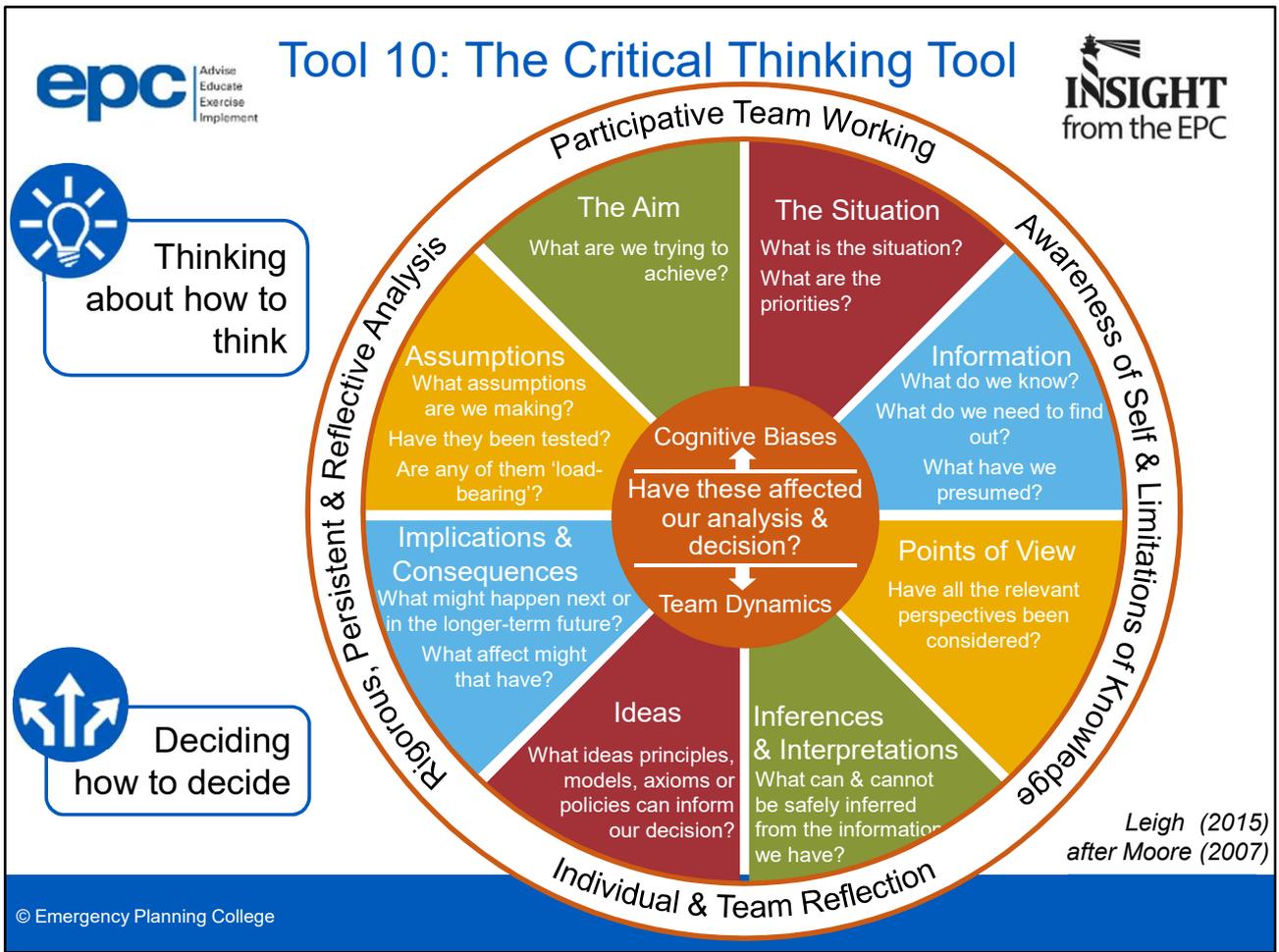
Tool 9: The Joint Decision Model



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This is the decision-making model recommended in the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles. The main point here that rational-deliberative models like this do actually work; it's been proved beyond reasonable doubt. It's also useful to have a tried and trusted standard model which is used by all the agencies and teams working together in the combined response.

But they do have to be used well and used in a disciplined manner, with a proper appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses. The danger with all such process-based models is GIGO – garbage in, garbage out. That is why we recommend the use of critical thinking at every stage of the model. To that end, we provide a critical thinking tool (see the next graphic).



Because garbage in leads to garbage out, we recommend the use of this tool to help decision-makers apply critical thinking checks at each stage of the decision process – and to be mindful of the biases and heuristics that warp our thinking. We may not always be able to do much about them – but we need at least to understand them, watch for them having excessive impact on our choices and mitigate them whenever possible or necessary, in ourselves and in those around us.

It's an interesting argument that critical thinking takes us in two specific areas – thinking about how to think (metacognition) and deciding how to decide. This makes it a challenging discipline. Paradoxically, and in crises, it can help with the application of challenging disciplines if we turn them into a process – like the steps in an aide-memoire or by following a mnemonic. We say 'paradoxical' because we are at one and the same time identifying the intellectual difficulties and recommending that we deal with them by reduction (or simplification) to process. The balancing act is not to over-simplify or become 'process bound'. Keep referring back to what you are trying to achieve.

The 'process' in this case is the Framework for Critical Thinking. Its primary use is as a check. It asks the decision-maker to ask herself:

- Have we really considered all the possible dimensions of this decision? This is the 'cake slices' in the model.
- Have we demonstrated the behaviours identified? These are around the outer rim of the model.
- Have we examined our thinking for influences? These are in the central circle of the model.

We mentioned cognitive biases (or 'decision traps') in Short Guide 1 ('Key Concepts').

The 'team dynamics' referred to in the centre of the model refer mainly to two particular phenomena:

- **Groupthink**

This is the tendency of highly cohesive groups to cohere around a particular mind-set or strategy and shut down consideration of other options and their own critical thinking;

- **Risk appetite**

This is less well documented but seems common sense. A group can display a higher appetite for risk than most of the individuals in it would – if they were working separately. This seems to be related in some way to dilution of responsibility. The potential danger (especially when combined with groupthink) is obvious.

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