Splitting an EMON

By Robert Bunker, Ph.D. and Sid Heal

All events requiring a tactical intervention tend to evolve from a simpler form to one that is more complex. A warrant service that escalates to an operation with barricaded suspects, for one example, or fires that eventually require evacuations, protests and marches that erupt into riots, and so on. Likewise, the response organizations that are charged with managing these incidents must change to accommodate the unfolding circumstances. These types of organizations are called "emerging multi-organizational networks," or more commonly just by the acronym "EMON."[1]

As the complexity and scope of a situation increases so too must an EMON. More and different types of resources from any number of agencies, jurisdictions and disciplines are added to enable a suitable response. A problem occurs when at some point the organization exceeds the abilities of the original incident commander's ability to effectively manage everything and subordinates need to be assigned responsibility for components and/or functions. The question then becomes, how should such an organization be split?

Five ways to split an EMON

Fortunately, much has been learned from the business world experiencing the same difficulties, albeit in a more leisurely fashion. This so-called "division of labor" is a concept that can be traced back to antiquity, with everyone from ancient Greek philosophers to modern-day economists weighing in. Fundamentally, it has long been established that efficiency and control are enhanced by grouping workers according to shared characteristics in one of five categories. These are *time, area, purpose, process* or *clientele*.

Time is the most common method of splitting a response organization and quite naturally falls along the seams of shift changes. During emergencies, EMONs are ordinarily divided into "operational periods," often exceeding the common eight-hour shifts to "twelve and twelves," meaning twelve hours on and twelve hours off. Regardless of the length of the operational period, each shift is commanded and staffed by different personnel and the organization itself often requires different functional specialties, especially when the shifts are in both daylight and darkness.

A second method is by **geographical area**, especially if the situation is unfolding in noncontiguous areas of operation.[2] Grouping people by where they are physically located and working allows closer coordination and supervision. It also provides a means of creating impromptu expertise by providing a capability for novices to work alongside experts, not only learning from them on the job, but collaborating in completing essential tasks too urgent to wait for specialists.

A third method is **purpose**. Purpose refers to the objective or end on which an activity is focused. When EMONs are separated by purpose, they are almost always by function. For example, all personnel assigned to a single function like traffic control, containment, communications, evacuations, and so forth, could be grouped into a single command.

Component units of an EMON grouped according to purpose are commonly assigned missions that cross jurisdictional and geographical lines, and even shifts. This occurs when the activity is deemed so critical that the component is granted semi-autonomy and required to operate with only minimal instructions from higher headquarters.

One of the best examples is the logistical function. Once an operation is underway and an EMON is established, those personnel assigned to logistics are required to anticipate, procure, and distribute food, tools, ammunition, equipment and all other logistical needs to sustain the operation without separate instructions for every activity.

A fourth method is by **process**. Process refers to the methodology or ongoing series of actions to accomplish some activity. Separating an EMON by process is useful when knowledge of a process is a major contributing factor in accomplishing a similar, but not identical activity.[3] Say, for example, that a major evacuation is required and one of the desired factors is the tracking of refugees for
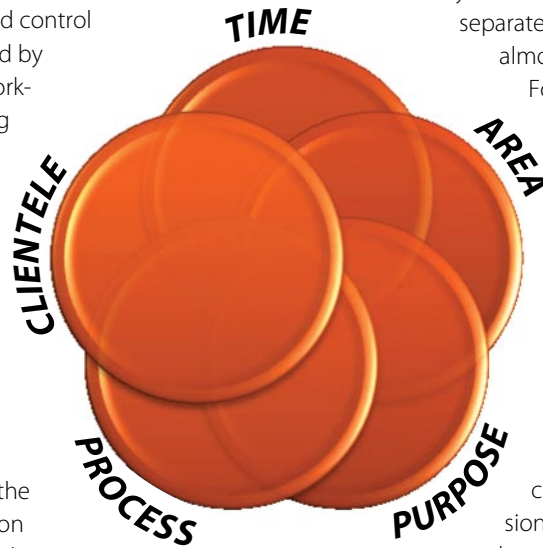
early reunification with families and loved ones. This is especially important when refugees like young school children, invalids, and the like, are incapable of assisting.

Besides all the critical requirements like transportation, housing and feeding, knowing where a person is physically located and how to contact them can be especially important. The incident commander may split the response organization by grouping persons with the necessary skills to provide this ability. Because tracking inmates is a similar process to what is needed to track refugees, custody and correctional personnel will not only have personal knowledge of how best to accomplish the assignment but also possess special equipment, such as wristband identification, computers, software, and so forth.

The last method is by **clientele**. Clientele refers to a grouping of people, regardless of how they are identified or assembled, and for whom some service is required to be provided. Although not as common for splitting an EMON as the other four methods, one example of splitting an EMON by clientele might be when there are a large number of refugees, as during a flood, fire or earthquake.

An incident commander who is actively involved in lifesaving operations will not want a competing interest, even one as important as caring for refugees. Consequently, one method of splitting the EMON is to assign all tasks related to refugees to a single command. This component of the larger organization would then be responsible for all duties related to refugees, such as transportation, shelter, food, security, etc., regardless of where the refugees are physically located.

By now the advantages of splitting an EMON along these natural divisions should be apparent. It should also be clear that these methods allow close coordination and supervision even when personnel are separated geographically, by time, or working alongside but with a separate mission as other components of the EMON. A commander who understands this natural division of labor is better able to make informed decisions and exploit the individual and collective expertise inherent in all such organizations. ◄◄

About the authors

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Endnotes

1. For more information on EMONs, see "Emerging Multi-Organizational Networks—EMONSs," *The Tactical Edge,* Winter 1999, p. 62.

2. For more information on an area of operation, see "Terrain Appreciation, *The Tactical Edge,* Summer 2006, pp. 58-59.

3. If it were an identical activity, the most likely separation would be by purpose since it would constitute a function.