

TEAM DECISION-MAKING

During a simulated terrorist attack

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Abstract

Decision-making during major incidents has been described as inherently uncertain, requiring the coordination of multiple agencies. When an incident occurs, the overall control of the incident and subsequent resources is managed by the Strategic Coordination Group (SCG). This research drew on data from a simulated response to a Marauding Terrorist Firearms Attack (MTFA) at a local shopping centre. Three simulated SCG'S were video-recorded and Social Network analyses was conducted to explore communication during response. In addition, task flow diagrams were produced to represent how the teams managed the incidents and to highlight instances of good teamwork and areas of improvement.

Introduction

When a major incident occurs within the U.K, it is necessary for a large number of agencies to come together quickly to provide a coordinated response. Major incidents are dynamic and uncertain environments, making it difficult for teams to operate effectively. This research is focused specifically on the Strategic level of response, under which sits Tactical and Operational (see Fig. 1). At the Strategic level, chief officers from the blue-light services and other local council and Government agencies come together to decide the over-arching strategy and possible longer term impacts of an incident. The aim of this research was to explore team decision-making and communication during Strategic Command Groups at different stages following a terrorist incident and to provide practitioner focused recommendations.

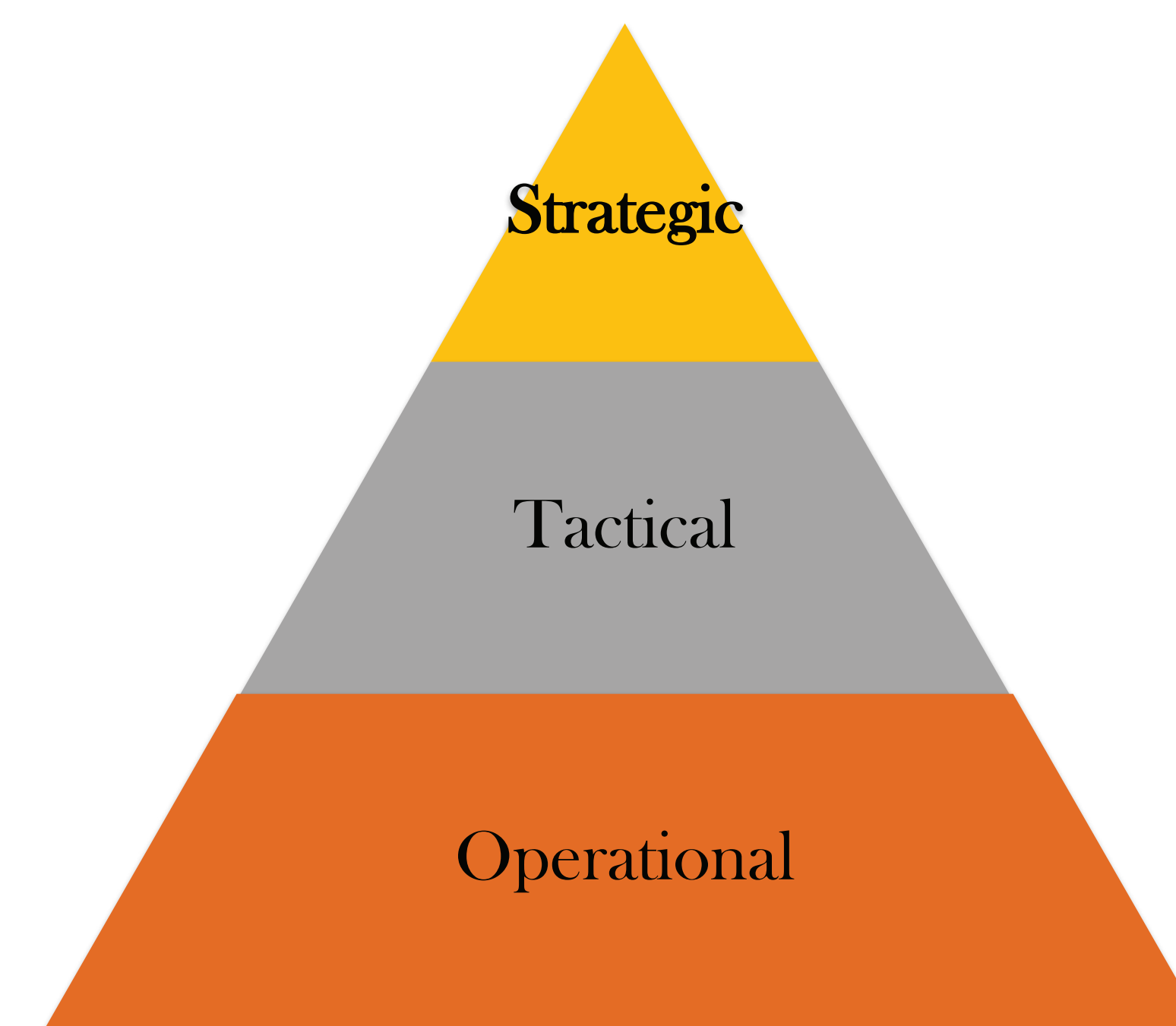


Fig.1

Method

This research has adopted a Naturalistic Decision-making framework, emphasising the need to collect data with expert practitioners as oppose to student based samples.

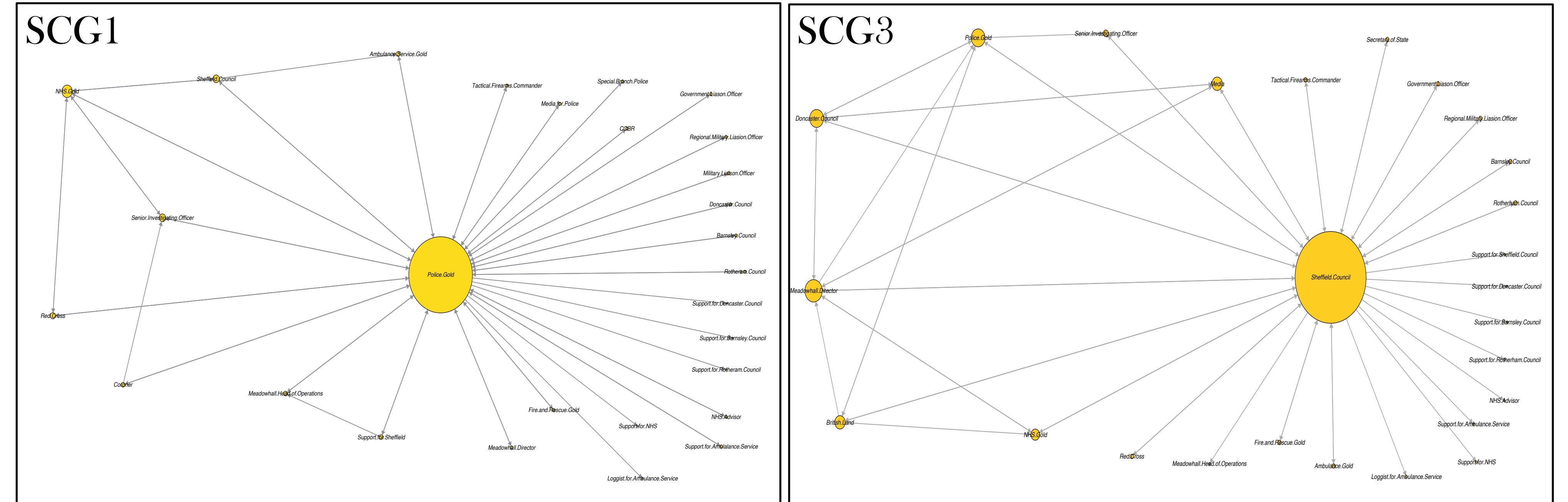
- We video-recorded the Strategic Command Groups (SCG's) response to an MTFA incident. Three SCG's took place at different intervals following the incident: (i) when the incident was ongoing, (ii) 48 hours following, (iii) 3 weeks after the resolution of the incident.
- Social Network analyses were conducted to explore the communication between different team members during each of the SCG.
- A task flow diagram was produced for each SCG to illustrate how teams managed the incident and the recovery.



Results and Discussion

The Social Network Analyses

SCG1



By comparing the networks of SCG1 and SCG3, it is possible to highlight differences in how information is communicated in the immediate aftermath of an incident and three weeks following:

- A decrease in the centrality statistics (.86 to .76) and increase in density (.077 to .087) indicated that the network for SCG3 was less centered around the chair and that there was greater overall connectivity between team members.
- This was likely due to the immediate threat of the incident during SCG1, meaning that a great deal of time was spent by the chair outlining the strategy and threats to harm. During the recovery phase of the incident in SCG3, there was less urgency, with more time to debate issues around recovery

The Task Flow Diagrams

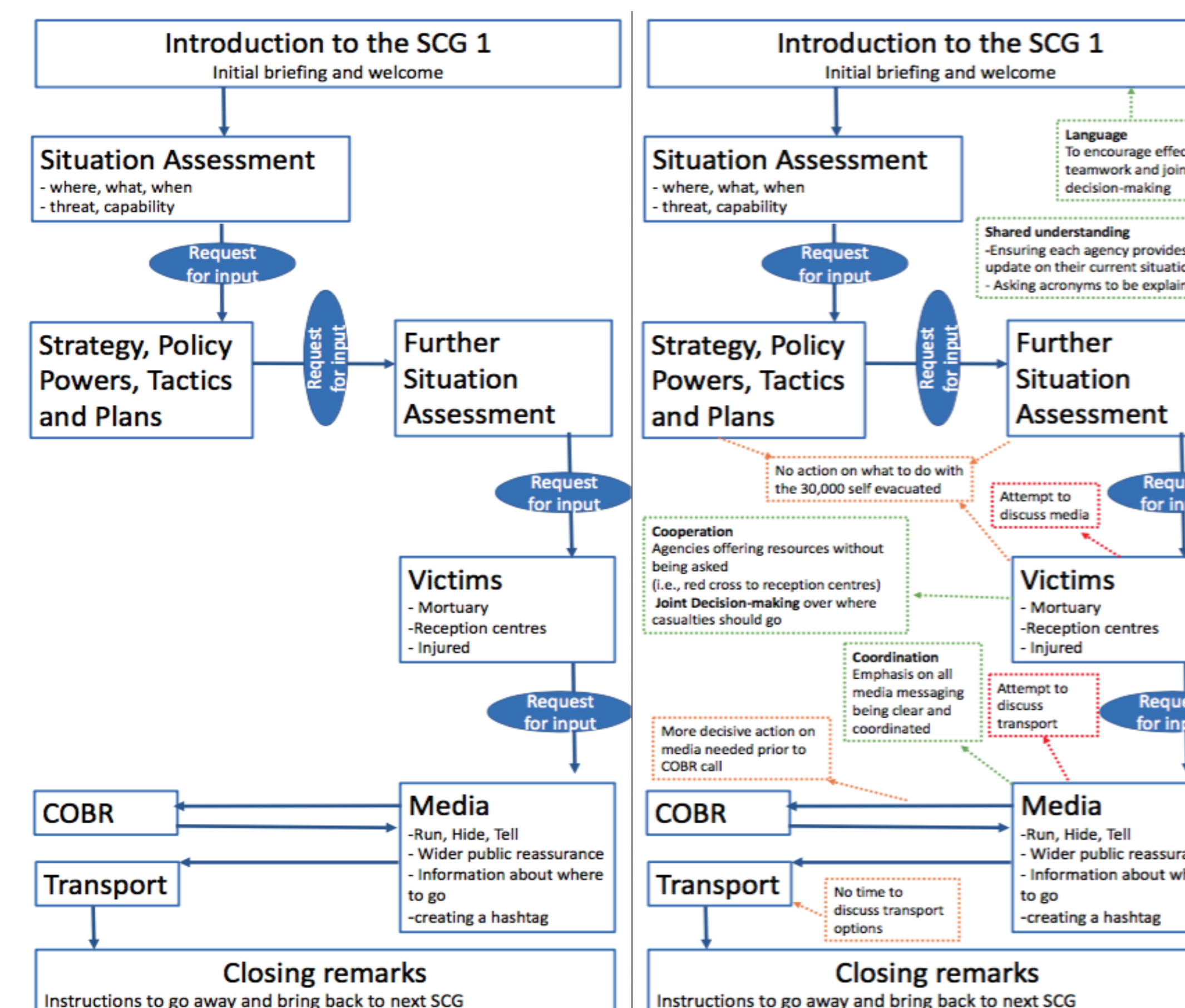


Figure 2 is the task flow analysis for SCG1. On the left the task flow is annotated to identify barriers to decision-making and instances of effective teamwork:

- The chair encouraged joint decision-making with inclusive language, providing a platform of shared understanding and coordinated action.
- Some issues were not adequately deal with (what to do with the 30,000 who self-evacuated out of the shopping center). This was often due to key information not being listened to.
- There were several instances where team members attempted to deviate from agenda items, wasting time and causing the meeting to lose focus.
- More decisive action on media messaging was needed earlier on in the meeting.

Fig.2