

The Use of Scenarios in Incident Management

We recommend that you look at the slides before you read this.

In order to manage an incident involving a search for a missing person we need a plan. Ideally this plan will be the outcome of some organised process or procedure – such as the Six Step Process – and will spell out:

- where to search
- how to search – the resources and methods to use
- what confinement is needed
- any investigation to be carried out

These are the critical components of our plan and need to be must be based on solid foundations.

The best approach to the problem is to try to create some kind of story as to what the missing person did after they left the point where they were last known to be. We are not talking about a guessing game here; a guess is characterised by a lack of consideration of available information and, as we will see, we are going to consider carefully the information we can get from a number of sources.

A story like this is called a scenario. There are three aspects of scenario construction that we need to understand – these are

- what is it based on
- what kind of structure should it have
- what are its properties

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We will consider each of these in turn.

1. What is it based on?

A scenario is based on four different sets of information:

- a. the missing person's profile – this will tell us who we are looking for, what kind of person they are, their age, background and health
- b. the incident history – what did the missing person set out to do and what were they doing when were they last seen
- c. map analysis – what kind of area are we in, where are the hazards and what are they, what might act as a barrier or a magnet for our missing person and are there any well defined routes that they might have been following
- d. Lost Person Behaviour information – once we have decided on the category of the missing person then Lost Person Behaviour information tells us:
 - the condition that people in this category have been in (dead, injured or unhurt) when located in previous incidents – this helps us to decide whether the missing person in our incident is likely to respond to searchers
 - the location that they have been found in – most categories of missing person tend to favour certain types of location and by matching these with what we can see on the map then we can identify likely places for the missing person to be

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- how far they were found from the point where they were last known to be – this will give us an idea of the size of the area that we are going to have to search

2. What kind of structure should a scenario have?

A scenario should have three main components:

- a. an element of activity or purpose – what might the missing person have done to take them away from the point where they were last known to be?
- b. a direction of travel – which direction would that activity take them in from that point, bearing in mind any barriers, magnets and routes that we have identified on the map?
- c. a destination – this could either be some place that they set out to travel to or a location from Lost Person Behaviour information that is consistent with their direction of travel

3. What properties should a scenario have?

Ideally, a scenario will have the following properties:

- a. it should fit in with the known facts – these will be contained in the missing person's profile, the incident history or features on the map
- b. it should be realistic – this means fitting in with what Lost Person Behaviour information tells us about this kind of person and this type of terrain rather than involving extraneous agencies and chance events

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The preferred method is to generate a number of scenarios rather than pin all your hopes on just one. How many scenarios should you generate? Around five or six is usually adequate – this is likely to give us sufficient places to search in our plan; any more and we may have a problem with too many to handle; any less and we may be missing out on some perfectly reasonable possibilities.

Two things that we need to do are:

- a. write down all of the scenarios that we are going to take into account in the production of our plan – if we are going to search a particular location because of a particular scenario then that scenario needs to become part of our incident documentation
- b. give each scenario a likelihood – when we start to commit resources we are going to do so on the basis of where we consider the missing person most likely to be. That will come out of our scenario likelihoods, and they in turn will come out of what Lost Person Behaviour information tells us this kind of person is most likely to do.

Finally:

- without scenarios we are doing little more than guessing at where the missing person might be
- we need to consider all four information sources to create scenarios – missing person profile, incident history, map analysis and Lost Person Behaviour

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information; if we leave one of them out we will get an incomplete picture

- the generation of scenarios needs to be an established part of our incident management procedure

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