

**Defining the Role
of the
Fire Gold Commander**

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Abstract

When significant disasters such as the Buncefield fire or widespread flooding in Worcester occur, the emergency services operate a tried and trusted command structure in order to mitigate the effects, and coordinate the multi-agency response. These command structures start at Bronze (operational), sometimes elevate to Silver (tactical) and in significant crises ascend to Gold (strategic). Under complex crisis conditions, high levels of uncertainty can challenge current wisdom and situational mapping and call for innovative actions. In these situations, the Fire Gold Commander must be able to coordinate their service's response to achieve the optimal result: containment and the mitigation of public disruption.

This research project was established to recognise the role of the Gold Commander and to help in developing the effectiveness of that role. Evidence from existing Gold Commanders is presented and analysed in order to explore their perceptions of the role, and to consider whether there is a requirement for more adequate definition. Ultimately, this research will argue that strategic leaders should exemplify this post through the development of a Fire Gold Commander Standard.

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Finally I would like to dedicate this work to all my family, particularly Charlie and Janine, who have 'lost' their Dad for many a weekend and holiday period, and last but not least to Karon, thank you for your support and selflessness in allowing me the time I needed to complete this.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

Academic analysis of the Gold Commander role by Flin and Arbuthnot (2002) reveals that strategic commanders apply analytical skill sets that are leadership oriented and focus on issues such as long term planning, and restoration of normality. Alternatively, Silver (tactical) Commanders are challenged with decision making that is inherently dynamic and relies upon immediate, situational based decision making processes (Flin and Arbuthnot, 2002, p.17). Considering that the Gold Commander's role differs from Bronze or Silver, there is a potential that experience gained from outside the emergency service environment may be beneficial when operating at the strategic command level. The complexity of multi-agency operations and tactical coordination during crisis conditions requires leaders to have explicit skills and competencies in order to bring successful resolution to incidents. The role of the Fire Gold Commander, whilst established according to Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) protocols and objectives, is frequently conflicted with the particular responsibilities of individuals at the Silver (tactical) and Bronze (operational) levels. As Ainge (2010, p.14) argues, the FRS *'needs to become more effective in the future, and the old methods of nurturing managers will not develop the leadership skills required for this modern service'*. Therefore, it may be that historic standards and hierarchical expectations are insufficient given the complexity of modern society. This investigation will attempt to understand the

perceptions of existing Fire Gold Commanders in order to evaluate whether the role is adequately understood, and consider if the role can be more effectively defined.

1.2 Hypothesis, Questions and Aims

Accordingly, the hypothesis for this research is *‘that the structured guidance provided for Fire Gold Command does not correlate with the perceptions of some individuals who currently undertake the role’*.

Research Questions

In order to test the hypothesis, the following research questions are posed:

- 1 Does the current guidance adequately define the Fire Gold Command role?
- 2 Do the competence requirements for Fire Gold Command vary according to the type of incident?

Research Aim 1

To conduct a critical review of Fire Gold Command, in order to determine the requirements of the role, and its context within the FRS (Context setting).

Research Aim 2

To perform an analysis of data collected from primary research that focuses on the perceptions of experienced Fire Gold Commanders, in order to evaluate if this understanding reflects the guidance currently provided (Research question 1).

Research Aim 3

To further understand the role by identifying issues which impacted upon the Fire Gold Commander, in the context of two national multi-agency incidents: Buncefield, and the 2007 flooding in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire (Research question 2).

1.3 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation explores a complex, highly specific phenomenon relating to the operational effectiveness and performance of key fire service leaders who operate one of the most important civil response agencies in the UK. The subsequent chapters have been organised in order to present both primary data and secondary data, to generate an epistemology of responsibility for Gold Commanders in the FRS. The following is a brief outline of the chapters and their primary objectives:

Chapter 2: Background: This chapter presents the actual guidance and job specific expectations associated with Fire Gold Commander responsibilities, highlighting the current standards and expectations.

Chapter 3: Literature Review: This chapter establishes the academic precedence which has emerged over the past several decades of research regarding leader competency, experience-based learning standards, and operational skill sets. The chapter attempts to identify optimum standards in leadership development, training, and knowledge acquisition. Finally the chapter examines organisational culture, to establish whether this impacts upon perceptions of the role.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology: In order to generate relevant, targeted data regarding the role of the Gold Commander (under current FRS protocol), this chapter outlines the research methods employed in the collection and analysis of data attempting to capture the perceptions of key industry participants.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation: In this chapter, a comprehensive presentation of multiple data streams is provided, highlighting the evidence generated from an industry survey and interviews administered to existing Gold Commanders in the UK FRS.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Analysis: Offering synthesis of both primary and secondary data findings, this chapter considers a leadership paradigm for Fire Gold Commanders, highlighting opportunities for skills and responsibilities rehabilitation.

Chapter 7: Conclusions: This chapter offers summative analysis based on all the data collected for this research.

Chapter 8: Recommendations: Given the direct relevance of this investigation to the Fire Gold Commander, this chapter will offer recommendations for future amendments to the guidance provided for this position and its expectations.

Chapter 2: Background

2.1 The Gold Environment

This chapter will provide context and understanding of the environment in which the Fire Gold Commander operates, where it is situated at the level principally designed to deal with major incidents, and improve multi-agency cooperation and coordination. Responses to major incidents are coordinated via the Gold – Silver - Bronze (GSB) command framework, which the police in England and Wales introduced following a number of riots in the UK in the 1980's, after it was identified that an over-reliance on rank structures highlighted deficiencies in communication, coordination and cooperation (Flin and Arbuthnot, 2002, p.16). Language comprehension is an important component of effective inter-agency planning and training, and it is intended that the levels should be appropriately defined by their different functions according to the aforementioned three discrete levels of command.

The application of command and control by different emergency responding organisations has at times been problematic, particularly in the implementation and mutual understanding of individual command systems, and it has been recognised that the multi-agency environment should focus on the principles of cooperation and coordination (Dynes 1994, cit. Arbuthnot, 2008). Even the very terms '*command*' and '*control*' referred to in the

descriptions above may be interpreted differently, for they are *'to some extent, ambiguous and can mean different things to different communities'* (Arbuthnot, 2008). In order to clarify the definition for the purposes of this report, the description contained within the London Major Incident Plan (LESLP, p.22) is considered suitable and sufficient;

*'Any service may request the temporary assistance of personnel and equipment of another. In these circumstances, while the supporting service will relinquish the immediate **control** of those resources to the other service for the duration of the task, it will nevertheless keep overall **command** of its personnel and equipment at all times'.*

9-11-2001

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, caused a major review of the existing arrangements for the UK, and subsequently facilitated a unitary approach to emergency planning and response and guidance to civil responders. This resultant guidance was designed to increase resilience through legislation enshrined within the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004 (Cabinet Office, 2005). The framework, in which UK resilience is positioned, is now more effectively legally embedded in law and supported by detailed guidance following the introduction of the CCA. Civil protection in the UK now focuses on the concept of integrated emergency management (IEM), incorporating both preparation for, and response to, emergencies and the aftermath, and focuses on the effects of the incidents rather than their causes. Arbuthnot (2008)

Gold Silver and Bronze

Emergency Response and Recovery (ERR) (Cabinet Office, 2009) details the arrangements for managing and coordinating a multi-agency response via the GSB framework, and defines Bronze Command as;

‘The tier of command and control within a single agency (below gold level and silver level) at which the management of ‘hands-on’ work is undertaken at the incident site(s) or associated areas. The bronze level is also known as the operational level’.

Whereas, Silver Command is described as;

‘The tactical tier of command and control within a single agency (below Gold level and above Bronze level) at which the response to an emergency is managed’.

Finally, Gold Command is identified as;

‘The strategic level of command and control (above Silver level and Bronze level) at which policy, strategy and the overall response framework are established and managed for individual responder agencies’.

(Cabinet Office, 2009, Annex C)

Gold Commanders

For Gold commanders one of the priority roles is multi-agency liaison, and responsibility for logistics, planning, finance, and administrative concerns. If an incident requires a multi-agency response, Gold level decision making *‘will often involve political considerations and*

policy level decisions that will extend beyond a single organisation' (Home Office, 2008, p.16), and the required coordination will be conducted usually at police headquarters, invariably located some distance from the scene of the incident. The arrangement whereby the police provide the means of integration is principally due to the coordinating role that the police undertake, as the Police Gold is expected to *'chair the Strategic Coordinating Group'* (Cabinet Office, 2009, p.62). The Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG), colloquially known as 'Gold' is established to bring together strategic commanders from agencies involved in resolving the incident, who will generally be required to take a long view, for *'the task of the strategic commander is to plan and progress towards the restoration of normality'* (Flin and Arbuthnot, 2002, p.17).

Emergency Response and Recovery (Cabinet Office, 2009, p.68) provides greater clarity and suggests that the purpose of the Strategic level is to consider the emergency in its wider context, with the requirement to;

'Determine longer-term and wider impacts and risks with strategic implications; define and communicate the overarching strategy and objectives for the emergency response; establish the framework, policy and parameters for lower level tiers; and monitor the context, risks, impacts and progress towards defined objectives'.

FRS Gold Command

Academic analysis of the guidance identifies that, whilst there are a number of references to the 'Police Gold' commander, there is little if any reference to 'Fire Gold', a term that can

only be found within FRS guidance (Home Office, 2008). This research hopes to start redressing this missing element, and will return to this aspect later, but of necessity will primarily focus on the police context initially.

Guidance provided to the Police for the Strategic level of command, contends that '*the primary purpose of the SCG is to review the situation from a strategic perspective, and to deliver strategic leadership throughout the course of an emergency or major incident*' (NPIA, 2009, p.20). This suggests that one element of the role of a FRS Gold Commander is to remain focused on the overall picture, ensuring that they do not become concerned with detailed tactical or operational decisions. Additionally, a FRS Gold Commander must have executive authority to direct their own organisation's resources, and to commit expenditure as appropriate to the needs of the incident.

Currently, the UK threat level for international terrorism is set at 'Severe', meaning that a terrorist attack is highly likely (HMG, 2011). Alongside this threat; the National Risk Register (Cabinet Office, 2010) identifies other significant 'natural' disasters such as widespread flooding and pandemics that could have a significant impact on the nation. The range of threats and hazards listed on the National Risk Register, and the wide range of organisations that are included in the response arrangements, require effective inter-agency working/experience and gold command coordination to ensure successful intervention. It is within this arena of cooperation and interoperability that the Fire Gold Commander must perform at the strategic command level of the multi-agency command structure.

2.2 Summary

This chapter has introduced the methodology employed by emergency services to establish control at major incidents, and introduces the crucial role of the Fire Gold Commander. The following chapters will introduce primary and secondary data to evaluate whether the role is effectively and accurately defined according to the current requirements and protocols of the FRS. In addition, decision making strategies and organisational competencies will be considered within the context of crisis management and post-incident recovery.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the reader with background and context to the environment in which the FRS Gold Commander operates. Sourced from a variety of industry publications, academic journals, and published books, this chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of academic literature related to the skills and competency development amongst leaders in decision making positions across key civil agencies, particularly focusing on the characteristics associated with Gold Commanders in the FRS. These authors help to establish the epistemology of strategic decision making under crisis conditions, and present case study evidence directly related to the application of Gold Commander responsibilities under extreme conditions. From this evidence/data, critical evaluation helps to explain the research question in the context of contemporary ideas and thinking, with the intention to *'develop a good understanding and insight into relevant previous research and the trends that have emerged'* (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003, p.44). Ultimately, this chapter seeks to balance the defined role for Gold Commanders by evaluating the development of multi-agency decision making and crisis responses in complex and stressful situations.

3.2 Gold Command Decision Making

Gold level knowledge, in accordance with FRS guidance involves the detailed understanding of the political, social, and environmental implications of a given incident. Additionally, the Home Office (2008, p.88) suggest that Gold Commanders working at Brigade Manager level do not require the technical knowledge that a Crew Manager must possess. Notwithstanding this, whilst the impact of particular strategic decisions can have long term consequence, it is the decision making skills of commanders at all levels that ensures effective command and control in emergency response. FRS guidance identifies that naturalistic decision making (NDM), or the process of decision making under variable and complex real world conditions, can provide Commanders with the opportunity for achieving satisfactory (rather than optimal) decisions (Home Office, 2008, p.107). This study of the methods which experts utilise to make decisions under conditions of high uncertainty, inadequate information, shifting goals, high time pressure and risk, continues to be of interest to researchers, such as Flin, O'Connor and Crichton (2008, p.43) and may be a key consideration of this research.

Recognition-Primed Decision Making

The situational complexity and time sensitive response priorities present in the dynamic phase of an incident, introduces the concept of recognition primed decision making (RPDM), emphasising experience-tempered choices in the decision making process that are inherently based on previous situational outcomes and the classification of the immediate scenario

(Home Office, 2008, p.108). A variety of academic studies have dealt directly with the concept of RPDM (Johnson et al., 2009) along with knowledge based decision making (Sayegh et al., 2004; Yim et al., 2004), and intuitive decision making (Vanharanta and Easton, 2010). Potentially key to successful decision making, is the manner in which real life incidents are interpreted according to prototypical situations, and the recognition that decision makers may ultimately establish an analogous relationship between a current incident and the context in which previous decisions have been made (see Johnson et al. 2009, p.854). However, these studies have been undertaken in the context of a dynamic decision making environment, and high tempo situations such as these are unlikely to be present within the Gold environment, accordingly there is the potential that such earlier experiences may provide limited benefit to the decision maker at the strategic level, a concept that will be explored later in this research.

Inferred Decision Making

Inferred decision making, as mentioned above, ultimately establishes precedence for making rapid, crisis-oriented choices. However, the consequence of such direct association may be detrimental to public health and safety, as prototyping and reference standards may not actually align with the complexities of the current event. Particularly because stopping the incident is not the only factor. Other resilience considerations need to be prime when making strategic decisions and this experience will rarely form part of the bank of knowledge involved in the RPDM or naturalistic decision making process available to Fire Gold Commanders.

A comprehensive model of this process has been developed by Johnson et al. (2009, p.854) and is reproduced in Figure 1. The most important segment of this particular process is the four-stage recognition of situational components in which decision makers will expect particular occurrences through the recognition of relevant cues, establishing plausible goals on the basis of past information and enforcing or pursuing typical actions associated with the prototype of the past.

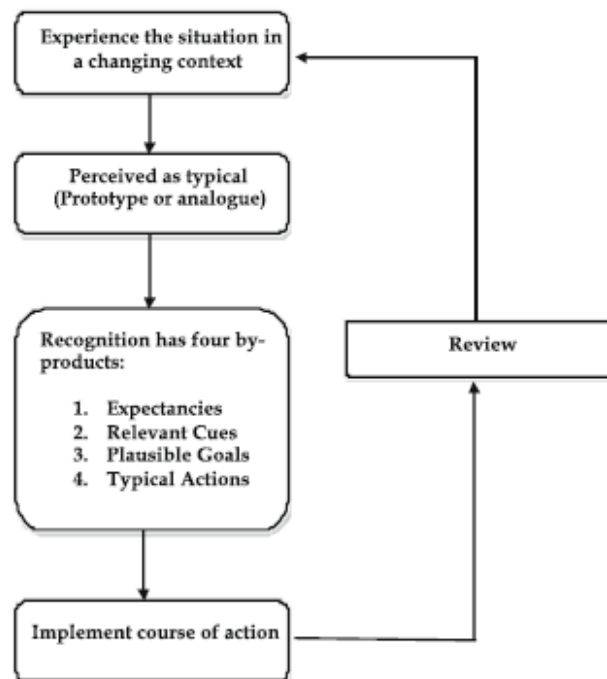


Figure 1: High Level Overview of RPDM (Source: Johnson et al., 2008, p.254)

For Gold Commanders, such a decision making model may have particular consequences if they lack field experience or tactical decision making. However, there is little evidence to

suggest that this particular model of rapid decision making is fit for purpose in any complex crisis scenarios, which may need much more than operational ability.

For example, whilst RPDM may be based primarily upon an innate cognitive affiliation between a past and present experience, there are more psychological influences at work than such a singular, direct-stream process. Sayegh et al. (2004, p.180), use the terror attacks on 9/11 as a means of incorporating intuitive and emotional reactions into crisis management decisions along with more traditional cognitive processes. In fact, the authors challenge that under highly critical scenarios, command decisions are frequently made on the basis of;

- intuitive interpretation, the link between all elements of experience (education, training, exposure)

- various cognitive influences, an interpretation of efficacy

- emotional memory

(Sayegh et al., 2004, p.185).

One of the most important characteristics of this decision making model is emotional memory, an experience-based factor that creates a unique memory moment for interpretation under future crisis conditions.

Emotional Memory

Sayegh et al. (2004, p.189) suggest that for command decisions, emotional memory may allow decision makers to make optimal choices at a rapid pace, particularly when they do not have time to recollect past details, or the various components in experienced situations. Such arguments are directly relevant to the valuation of experience in Gold Commander responsibilities where a shortage of emotional memory and experience can be assumed to restrict the speed to decisions. However if the emotional memory lacks currency, the decision making may be flawed, unless additional support personnel are available to assist with the strategic process.

Rational Decision Making

Rational decision making is defined by Sayegh et al. (2004, p.185) as the ability to process information clearly and logically, interpreting the event effectively and reducing the potential for distortions of reality due to more emotive conditioning. Commanders are forced to make crisis level decisions, and those managers with experience may have a larger awareness or repertoire of possible causes, identifying only the most relevant information cues (Sayegh et al., 2004, p.186). Knowledge foundations have a direct influence over the decision making process, as the ability to recognise the problem (know-what) and establish a causal link between events (know-how) effects the end decision making commitment. It may be that such knowledge modelling allows managers to focus on the overall problem structure rather than on behaviour patterns or events, providing opportunities for achieving strategic goals and primary objectives. However, making decisions which rely on this knowledge modelling may be affected by the remoteness from the scene, which could create a positive or negative

outcome, dependant on the individual's interpretation of events. Clearly, the potential for a dichotomy between these two decision making theories is considerable, and knowledge management that is based on causal links and strategic objectives is more likely to avoid the complications associated with emotive or assumptive processes.

3.3 Leadership

The role of a FRS strategic manager at operational incidents is articulated within the National Occupational Standard (NOS), as the person responsible for '*providing strategic advice and support to resolve operational incidents*' (IPDS, 2003). The researcher finds it surprising that there is no specific mention of leadership within the standard, although it is referred to several times within the FRS guidance, as '*leadership is in the domain of critical incident command, often characterised by the need to deal with uncertainty in demanding timeframes*' (Home Office, 2008, p. 9). However, the newer Civil Contingencies NOS, aimed at those who '*provide leadership in an emergency response at the strategic (gold) level*' (CC AG1, 2008), clearly identifies leadership as a key skill. Furthermore, at the time of writing, the researcher noted that the draft Level 7 Strategic Incident Command qualification also makes reference to '*strategic leadership*' (Skills for Justice 2011).

Qualities of Leaders

Trait theories of leadership were popular during the early to mid 1900's, and worked on the assumption that great leaders are born great (Sashkin and Sashkin 2003) and that by defining the necessary traits of effective leaders, the secrets of leadership could be unlocked (Densten 2003). If leadership was a result of definable traits then it would be reasonable to expect that a defined list of those traits would have been found after over 100 years of research. This has not been found, and the debate continues regarding whether an individual must possess a definite set of characteristics in order to be a leader in any given situation. Some authors have suggested that the traits necessary for battlefield leadership would be effective in a school environment, dismissing the impact of the situation (Sadler, 1997). Research indicates that there are varying opinions on the level of requirement of these very different qualities. Annotating these qualities into a list form results in a comprehensive summation, but it is not clear whether a leader such as a Gold Commander should possess all, or just some of them. Equally, it can be argued that if the list is not exhaustive it is possible that the Gold Commander might need other leadership qualities not currently on the list.

The specific inclusion of leadership in the civil contingencies NOS, the generic standards designed for emergency responders, adequately reflects the position of the Police Gold Commander, who has '*ultimate responsibility and accountability*' for leading the police response to an incident. This clearly defined leadership requirement sits alongside a secondary function, to '*establish and chair the SCG in order to coordinate the emergency or major incident*' (NPIA, 2009b p.26). Whilst the Police Gold Commander is required to ratify and review the progress of the Silver Commanders tactical plans (NPIA, 2009b p.25), their

FRS counterpart is required to set tactical parameters for Silver to operate within, and prioritise the personnel and resource demands (Home Office, 2008, p.24).

Ratifying, or approving the plan suggests that the Police Gold will have an increased degree of involvement with tactical decision making than their FRS counterpart, although the Fire Gold is likely to provide major support to Silver, often discussing tactics and their implications and acting as an advisor (Home Office, 2008, p.16). The researcher suggests that the guidance provided for the Fire Gold Commander in terms of the level of interaction required with Silver, is not as clearly defined as that found within the police guidance, which may be one of the reasons for the variance in understanding of the role by some of the survey participants. This point was emphasised by Interviewee C, who when asked if the role was adequately defined, stated;

“I don’t think it can be that well defined, because it depends on the nature of the incident”.

This view was echoed by other interviewees, but one (Interviewee E) went further in highlighting the lack of clarity in their opinion;

“The interesting thing is that I’m still not clear. Until recently there seems to be this concept that everybody now talks about as Fire Gold, as opposed to multi-agency Gold, that’s been presented to me by different people in different ways”.

Perhaps the term 'commander' is a misnomer for the FRS, as it is difficult to identify what actual command decisions are made by Fire Gold, as these will generally only be implemented at the tactical and operational levels, with the Silver commander having unequivocal responsibility for outcomes at an incident. Ultimately, it is argued that the Police are better practiced than their FRS counterparts in Gold Command level decision making, due to the frequency of events they are involved in, along with a well developed process of training and validation, as will be explained later in this research.

3.4 Organisational Culture

The impact of organisational culture upon the role of Fire Gold was explored during this research, in an attempt to ascertain whether there was a perception that cultural barriers prevented access to Gold Commander positions. Organisational culture may have an impact upon leadership, and the organisation's values, structure, hierarchy and rules could 'dictate' how a leader commands an incident, and ultimately the objective judgement of their effectiveness (Devitt, 2009 p.37). Devitt refers to Reiner's (1991) study of senior police officers, where he identified four different types of Chief Constable, the barons, bobbies, bosses and bureaucrats. Reiner contended that their different leadership styles will be reflected in the culture of the organisation and may influence the Chair of an SCG, and thus the style and approach with which a strategic multi-agency response is operated. If the Chair of an SCG adopts the style of a *'boss, who controls mainly through authority not power, doesn't suffer criticism gladly, and sees community policing as idealistic in the face of an*

overwhelming tide of crime' (Devitt, 2009 p.37), this will clearly affect the dynamics of the group. In this situation, organisational domain knowledge and technical understanding will be important, but certain non-technical skills such as personal resilience and self-confidence may have equal relevance.

Chan (1996) who carried out a study of police culture refers to Bourdieu's relational theory, which explains cultural practice as the result of interaction between cultural dispositions (habitus) and structural positions (field), situating culture in the social and political context of police work. Sackmann (1991) goes on to describe the essence of culture as *'the collective construction of social reality'*. Her cognitive model encompasses all forms of shared organised knowledge, as:

'The form of things that people have in their minds; their models for perceiving, integrating, and interpreting them; the ideas or theories that they use collectively to make sense of their social and physical reality' (Sackmann, 1991, p. 21).

Simply put this can be described as 'how we do things around here' and Baigent (2001) indicates that at different levels, there can be different considerations of what this means.

Nonetheless a Gold Commander's success is too important to rely on an individual's so called natural attributes or style. What is increasingly becoming clear during this research is that Gold Commanders must receive suitable training to perform the role. However the research

raises an important question – *“can there be any training if we don’t really know who we should be training to do the job, and what skills they actually need?”*

3.5 The Integrated Emergency Response Framework

Whilst Gold Command responsibilities are outlined according to principles and foundations tested and validated by the police since the 1980’s, the scope of this role is directly related to the greater UK resilience framework, and the requirement for effective interoperability (NPIA, 2009c). Emergency Response and Recovery outlines the expectations for individual and multi-agency responses to emergency scenarios. In particular, this key document establishes the foundations of command and control which are expected to be applied in variable scenarios. The principles of command, control and coordination or C³, are essential for characterising the level and breadth of responsibility afforded by the Gold Commander. For example, single agency groups maintain the authority to exercise a command function, whilst multi-agency groups are convened to coordinate varied responses according to a singular objective. Although as has been stated, the FRS is a tactical organisation, and therefore there is not a direct correlation with the Police. There is evident conflict and ambiguity in the definition of Gold Commander responsibilities when placed into the context of an SCG, as the GSB structure is intended to recognise Gold Commanders as a single agency level of command, however the SCG invokes a coordinating function, not a command function (Cabinet Office, 2009, p.62).

To demonstrate the evolution of the tiered command standard in the UK, it is beneficial to explore the priorities and objectives defined by the NPIA (2009a). This organisation recognises that essential to the nature of the multi-agency hierarchy is a foundation of consistency in the definition of demand. Accordingly, the NPIA (2009a, p.8) recognises the fundamental expectation that all commanders should be *'aware that their role is to make decisions, give clear directions, and ensure that those directions are carried out'*. What is essential within the police oriented ranking system is that Gold, Silver, and Bronze specialisation is a role based assumption of command, not a rank and file standard. As such, the appointed officers are nominated to a given role on the basis of their competencies, which are defined according to their demonstration of how they *'achieved, updated, and maintained this competency'* level. To further establish the appropriateness of purpose for these interested individuals, the NPIA suggests that a personal log should be maintained demonstrating operational deployment and learning, a foundation that is validated by consistent post-event enquiries (NPIA, 2009a, p.11). This research has identified that increasingly in this litigious society it is likely that commanders will be asked to evidence their experience and competencies.

3.6 Buncefield and Gold Command

On Sunday, 11th December 2005, the Buncefield Oil Storage Depot was rocked by a series of explosions which the Health & Safety Executive recognised as being of '*massive proportions*' (BMIIB, 2006). The resultant fire, which was the largest of its kind in peacetime Europe, provided unique challenges, not least for the tactical resolution of the incident. Over 40 people were injured in the incident, but fortunately there were no fatalities.

As causal analysis and legal proceedings have continued to evolve over the past six years, the Hertfordshire FRS (HFRS) has followed protocol, by producing a comprehensive review of the fire response both as agency indemnification, and compliance with FRS best practice in the wake of large scale, multi-agency crises. Post-crisis recommendations involve several key operational standards that have evolved from practical crisis management, resulting in recommending improvements in areas of resources, record keeping, communication, and national incident response teams. Analysis of these reports and enquiries shows that the integration of Gold Command decision making was essential to the successful conclusion of the incident during both the response and recovery phase.

In their 2006 report, HFRS acknowledges that in accordance with the Hertfordshire resilience major incident committee (HESMIC) standards, multi-agency command systems were initiated (See Figure 2). Whilst Bronze and Silver commanders were deployed at the scene, the Chief Fire Officer, Roy Wilsher, elected to adopt the role of Fire Gold Commander, and deployed to the SCG established at Hertfordshire Constabulary HQ. Based on emergency planning protocol, the Gold Commanders were in conference with other resilience team

commanders from a variety of different agencies including the Police, the Ambulance Service, the County Council, the District and Borough Councils, the NHS, and various supplemental agencies. This command centre integration subsequently provided strategic direction and tactical guidance to the Silver commanders, supporting key decision making, crisis mitigation initiatives, and a well coordinated response.

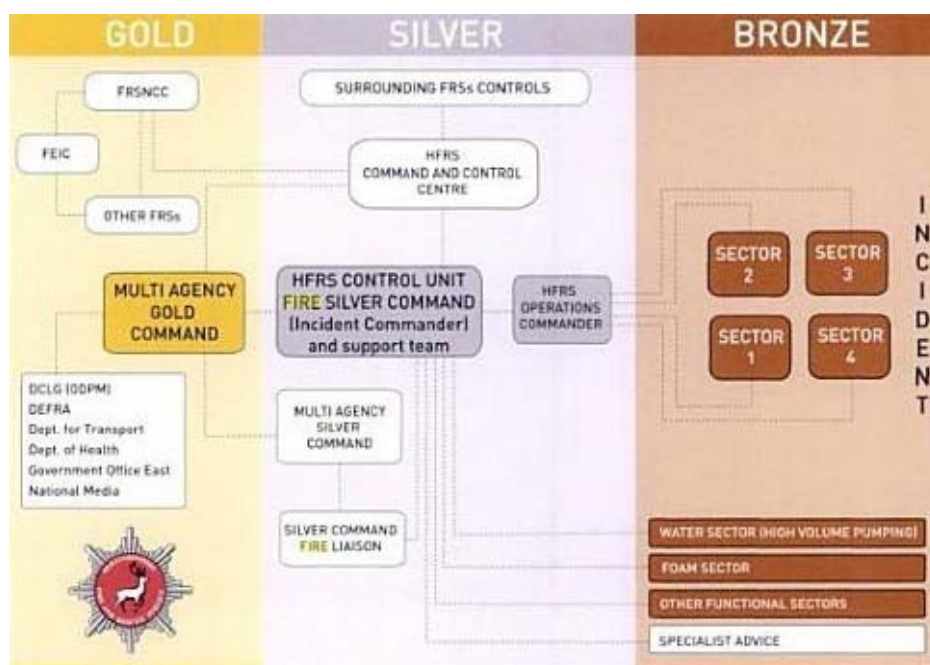


Figure 2: Hertfordshire Command Structure (HFRS, 2006)

Questions may be asked regarding the efficacy of the Gold Command guidance and management during this crisis, a standard which involves a variety of different accountability reference points. For example, HFRS (HFRS, 2006, p.68) reports that post-crisis discussion indicated that there was confusion during the crisis as a result of limitations in understanding

management strategies, which was a direct consequence of communication challenges. Further investigation of the administrative and hierarchical scenario determined that on several occasions, the multi-agency agreements, which were made at the Bronze and Silver levels, were subsequently overturned at higher levels (HFRS, 2006, p.54). The assumption of command by officers of varying capacities, and the subsequent demands of turnover, resulted in an assignment of lower ranking officers, including divisional officers and station officers, to multi-agency Gold and Silver (HFRS, 2006, p.55). This issue at times caused confusion for partner agencies and HFRS personnel and highlighted difficulties which may arise by not having *'representatives of appropriate seniority and authority in order to be effective'* at the SCG (Cabinet Office, 2009, p.71).

In their report on the emergency response systems and participants, the BMIIB (2007) recognised that there were specific challenges regarding SCG communication and requests for communication from various government agencies. Recommendation 26 under such guidance emphasised a review of Gold Commander communication responsibilities, suggesting that direct communication demands should be minimised in order to maximise efficiency (BMIIB, 2007, p.25).

The findings from the Buncefield incident are overtly positive regarding the coordinated multi-agency response. Ultimately, the role of the Gold Commander faced with this unique operational challenge became widely defined as providing communication liaison between the various agencies and participating government branches which were mobilised during the response. Given the centralised command structure, the extended roles of Silver and Bronze

commanders, and the coordinated actions of the field response team, the incident itself was successfully concluded in what is widely accepted as a positive FRS response effort. In a Hertfordshire (2006) media question and answer session, various questions were presented to the public relations team in an effort to uncover any deficiencies in the response protocol. When queried regarding the definition of the primary recovery scheme, which was of course a multi-agency strategy defined by Gold Command, the response emphasised the need for a recovery initiative similar to that which had been identified following the flooding incidents in Carlisle the previous year (Herts, 2006). This involved the establishment of three recovery sub groups, responsible for infrastructure, business support, and community welfare and support. Such findings indicate an experiential precedence, one through which debrief and post-recovery analysis indicated optimal strategic and tactical initiatives in order to mitigate public disruption. These findings will be addressed in greater detail during the discussion chapter of this dissertation but given the importance of resilience, one may ask if the required Fire Gold Command skills were more important on this occasion at the tactical, rather than strategic level.

3.7 Hereford and Worcestershire Flood of 2007

The widespread flooding in the summer of 2007 in Worcestershire required a massive response from Hereford and Worcestershire FRS (H&WFRS), with the BBC (2007) reporting that H&WFRS had been mobilised to multiple private residences and riverbanks in order to

rescue individuals caught unawares by the rapid rate of rainfall and subsequent flooding. The following year in 2008, a scrutiny report (H&WFRS, 2008) was published highlighting the strategic and tactical challenges faced during the crisis in the two response phases; 19-27 June, and 20-25 July. The report indicates that in the first phase, the Chief Fire Officer led the CFOA Flood Support Team in order to advise on the deployment of specialist rescue resources, and ensured *'the provision of strategic intelligence, and coordinating special rescue assets for deployment into the risk areas'* (H&WFRS, 2008, p.9). In the second incident, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer assumed the role of Fire Gold Commander. A review of the strategic initiatives implemented during this incident found that public warnings and communication through the Gold Command centre were extremely valuable yet required greater partnership with other agencies (H&WFRS, 2008, p.12).

Whilst the H&WFRS scrutiny report of the response to the 2007 flooding was extremely positive and oriented towards minor adjustments to various operational and tactical protocol, a subsequent DCLG (2008b) analysis of the response provided deeper insight into wider issues, and highlights some of the challenges facing the Gold Commander. In point 34, the DCLG (2008b, p.10) recognises that over 72,000 phone calls were routed through to the control room, requiring re-routing of these emergency requests to alternate fire response units throughout the UK. One of the major problems associated with this volume of calls and the subsequently reactive response by the control centre was that initially there was limited prioritisation, and responses to incidents were mobilised on a first come, first served basis (DCLG, 2008b, p.10). Subsequently, resources were held back and centralised to ensure appropriate response to the most pressing rescue and support demands.

Another recognised challenge was the nature of coordination over extended sectors of affected areas. The DCLG (2008b, p.11) reported that incident command was best suited to fixed sites, rather than the widespread distribution of emergencies resulting from such an expansive incident. The feedback suggested that publication of the new Incident Command Manual (3rd edition) would lead to increased awareness of centralised functions and responsibilities, and assist in improving strategic coordination DCLG (2008b, p.15). The new guidance issued in 2008 highlights the benefits of early SCG implementation to provide the necessary support required to coordinate the extensive scope of the flood impact mitigation strategy. The widespread flooding created significant challenges at all command levels, and the distributed nature of the responding agency responses, the initial lack of coordination, and the rapid pace of 999 emergency calls undermined the coordinated or strategic response which might have afforded a more strategic protocol for rescue, recovery, and rehabilitation. Ultimately, the particular challenges arising from multiple Silver command centres, with an extensive network of operations on the ground, at a time of public high expectation, is evidence of the unforeseen and unpredictable challenges that require specialised, strategic, and results oriented skill sets for the Fire Gold Command role.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has presented valuable literature regarding the nature of decision making in crisis scenarios, highlighting the widely recognised value of experience based responses, as the immediacy of the interventions required for complex scenarios frequently demand an equally immediate response. It has also considered the non-technical skills and cultural component of the Gold Commander role. Additionally, evidence was considered regarding the activities of the FRS in the Buncefield and Worcestershire flooding incidents, highlighting the strategic role of the Gold Commander, when involved in coordinating the multi-agency response to complex scenarios. As command guidance and expectations are defined, protocol will continue to evolve for the Fire Gold Commander. However, these findings indicate that strategic knowledge and protocol may be irrelevant under conditions of high uncertainty. The following chapter will introduce a research methodology which was designed to capture more targeted primary data regarding the Fire Gold Commander role, by identifying the perceptions from existing Gold Commanders of the areas of competency, proficiency and experience which they believe have the greatest impact.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This research is designed to assess the perceptions held by existing Fire Gold Commanders of their role, and this chapter presents the research methodology employed in the collection and analysis of data from selected FRS Gold Commanders. Based on an academic precedence, the foundations of this methodology were defined by past empirical studies in this field and general guidance by method based academics. Further, the primary aims and objectives of this investigation have served as parameters for the scope and scale of the data collection process. By adopting a high degree of triangulation, it is intended that any preconceptions held by the researcher will be mitigated. Ultimately, the principal goal of this research methodology was to generate sufficient and relevant data from a complex social dynamic, that could lead to an understanding of the perceptions held by existing Fire Gold Commanders, and contribute to future interpretation of the role.

As these Commanders constitute the smallest number in comparison to their Bronze and Silver equivalents, with experience of working within an SCG being relatively infrequent occurrences for the FRS, it results in a paucity of research opportunities when confined solely to the FRS. In considering how to generate primary data from this small group, the researcher identified that phenomenological evidence of systemic conflicts; regarding responsibilities,

accountability and purpose, have yet to be generated in sufficient quantity in the academic arena.

Accordingly, the academic precedence that is specific to this distinctive problem is inaccessible and true empirical contributions to this field are difficult to obtain. Alternatively, multi-level hierarchical structures in other civil agencies, such as the police, have been investigated in substantially greater detail. Academics such as Schafer (2010), for example, have embraced a qualitative, phenomenological research methodology in order to generate a leadership paradigm that is based on the more negative aspects associated with ineffective police leaders (Schafer, 2010, p. 741). This particular research model serves as just one example of a particular targeted research methodology, based on the generation of a typology of leader performance in an emergency service. A similar analysis of police leadership was compiled by Gottschalk (2007). However, in that particular study, qualitative elements including various situational phenomena were identified as directly relevant for effective leadership and skills development (Gottschalk, 2007, p. 44).

Examination of the academic precedence established in these investigations, identified that they employed a mixed method research technique in which both quantitative and qualitative data streams were analysed. Armed with this background information, the author ascertained whether this approach was likely to provide the most complete analysis of the Fire Gold Commander role, and considered the most appropriate method according to the research design process.

4.2 Research Methods

Fundamental to the research methodology, was the identification of the methods employed for data generation, which was to be principally gleaned from the *'people'* (Mason, 2002, p. 52), in this case senior FRS managers currently performing the role of Gold Commander. To assist in determining the most appropriate way of answering the research objectives and question, the researcher considered the Research Process 'Onion' (Saunders et al; 2003, p. 83). The first layer of the 'Onion' was the Research Philosophy, which reflects the interpretive approach (Saunders et al; 2003, p. 84) on the basis that Gold Command is a limited specialism with few opportunities for wider research.

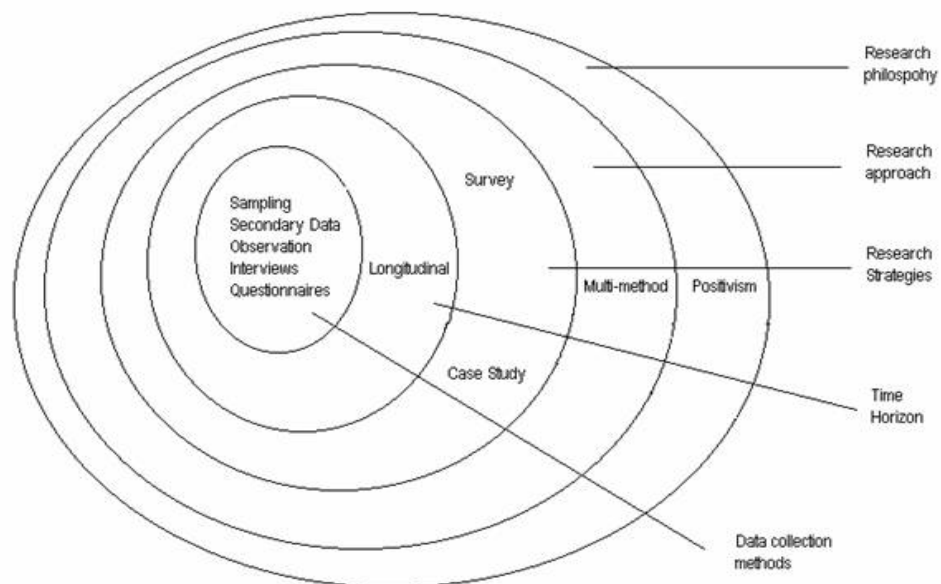


Figure 3: Saunders Research Onion

The researcher first considered undertaking a case study of two strategic managers in the FRS, one from the traditional career progression path who has ‘come up through the ranks’, with experience of operational and tactical command, and one who joined as a direct entrant, to establish whether there were key differences in their perceptions of the role.

Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner (1984: 34 as cited in Flyvbjerg, 2006) suggest that a Case Study is;

‘The detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide reliable information about the broader class, but it may be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses, which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases’.

Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 26) contends that;

‘The case study is a necessary and sufficient method for certain important research tasks in the social sciences, and it is a method that holds up well when compared to other methods in the gamut of social science research methodology’.

The case study approach was worthy of consideration as *‘case studies may be carried out to precede a survey, and can be used to identify key issues which merit further investigation’* (Bell, 2005, p.10). However, having considered the efficacy of this approach, the researcher recognised that it would be difficult to crosscheck the information obtained and correlate it

across the range of the target group via this method. Perhaps more importantly the requirement to ensure complete anonymity ultimately precluded the researcher from adopting the case study approach as a precursor to a wider survey. The issue of confidentiality was particularly important when considering that direct entrant Gold Commanders constitute a small percentage within the FRS, with the resultant heightened risk that individuals might be easily identified.

The next consideration was whether to take the opportunity to conduct observation of Gold Commanders in a simulated environment at the Fire Service College in January 2011, when the researcher was a delegate on the Gold Command Course Phase 3. Although this type of participant observation has the advantage of allowing researchers to share experiences, and better understand the subjects, it is time consuming and critics point to the problem of '*representativeness*' (Bell, 2005, p. 17). Ultimately, this approach was dismissed as being too problematic in providing assurance that the course delegates would have been a typical cross-representation of their peer group, and again importantly to retain anonymity. Finally there were very important considerations related to the researcher's ability to carry out this type of research while attending the course as a delegate.

Using a combination of research methods is likely to result in greater validity in the research, an approach known as triangulation which is a particular concept suggested as a way of knowing more about a phenomenon through the use of different research methods in one empirical investigation (Mason, 2002, p. 33). Accordingly, the researcher decided that a survey should be developed in which both qualitative and quantitative research methods were

employed, facilitating a suitable approach to obtain the desired information from the particular target group. Quantitative data was obtained from the survey, which also allowed qualitative data to be generated as the respondents had the option of clarifying their answer, which many took advantage of. The survey was designed to identify trends, which may not have been possible purely from the interviews that were conducted as part of this research.

The researcher designed the survey with questions aimed at exploring perceptions of the role of the Fire Gold Commander. It is suggested that surveys can '*provide answers to questions what? where? when? and how?, but it is not so easy to find out why?*' (Bell, 2005, p.14). Causal relationships, such as those found in incident command, can rarely, if ever, be proved by a survey method, but it can provide a useful method of obtaining facts. The main advantage of self-completion questionnaires is that they allow respondents to complete questionnaires at a time convenient to them, and provide answers and express beliefs anonymously to the researcher without feeling pressured (Simmons, 2001, p. 87). The limitations of the survey were that the information required was requested by question, and the response was therefore limited by design of closed questions, and sufficient understanding of the researcher's intent. Further, the validity of the data depended on the design of the questions, with results being limited to those who completed the survey and returned them. In order to minimise misunderstanding, the survey was pilot tested by a cross section of colleagues with experience of Gold and Silver Command. This was a beneficial process which provided the researcher with the opportunity to identify and amend some of the questions which were considered to be slightly ambiguous by these trial participants.

Simmons (2001, p.91) suggests that one of the biggest problems with traditional postal surveys is a low response rate. For this reason, the researcher decided to utilise an online web based survey, namely Survey Monkey (see Appendix D). This method provided a major advantage over the more traditional postal survey method, particularly at the initial design and pilot stage. A total of 40 questionnaires were sent out, followed up with telephone calls and emails where necessary, in an attempt to generate a maximum response rate. This was successful and 17 (42.5%) responses were returned. Analysis of the returns identified that two of these could not be used as the data was incomplete, therefore the researcher was able to utilise the responses from 15 participants, resulting in a final return rate of 37.5%. Although the researcher was disappointed that in spite of follow up emails, a higher return wasn't achievable, this compares favourably with response rates for postal surveys which may be as low as 20% (Simmons, 2001, P92).

The first segment of the survey involved the collection of participant responses to six basic role definition questions including job title, length of service, command experience, and assurance of Gold Commander current responsibility. A subsequent 24 questions asked the participants to choose their level of agreement to particular statements regarding the Gold Commander position, its interaction within the FRS incidence response protocol, and the various expectations of these professionals. The participants were asked to respond with answers which were scaled according to the Likert scale 1-5, with 1 = strongly agree, and 5 = strongly disagree. The responses were collated using Microsoft Excel and were grouped in order to generate a quantitative model of participant opinions and beliefs (see Appendix B). The survey also asked participants to explain their responses to each of the questions in an

open-ended format, offering qualitative, experientially based evidence and insight. These responses were integrated into a spreadsheet format and analysed on a line by line basis for thematic consistency and participant arguments (see Appendix C).

In concert with the survey, and in order to triangulate the results, the researcher conducted a combination of face to face and telephone interviews. It is considered that a major advantage of conducting interviews is adaptability, as they provide an opportunity for the interviewer to probe responses, and investigate ideas and feelings (particularly where time factors are an issue), in a way that is not possible with questionnaires (Bell, 2005, p. 157). As an interview is *'a conversation between interviewer and respondent with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the respondent'* (Moser and Kalton, 1971, cited Bell, 2005) the original intention was to conduct the interviews in person to facilitate an in-depth discussion. However, during the planning stage it became evident that this would not be possible. Ultimately, the findings from three face to face, and three telephone interviews were analysed, which provided useful primary data to support the survey.

The Gold Commanders selected to be interviewed were informed of the purpose beforehand via email, and the researcher was careful to ensure that the interviews followed the format of the questionnaire. During the course of the interviews, the techniques of prompting and probing were used to draw out in-depth responses. The initial questions were delivered similarly to each respondent, although there was improvisation to provide clarity and to draw out a data level. Fielding and Thomas (2001, p. 128) discuss the use of probing which they define as *'using follow-up questions to get a fuller response'* and suggest that probing can be

either verbal or non-verbal. The researcher was mindful at all times to ensure that any probing was as neutral as possible and did not incline the respondent towards a particular answer. The interviews were tape-recorded, which allowed eye contact with the interviewee and ensured accuracy when transcribing the interview (Bell, 2005, p.164). The interviewees were informed that although the interview was being taped their comments would not be attributed to them personally. The interviews were subsequently transcribed, and the interview recordings and notes are held in a password protected file, and will be destroyed six months after this research is handed in. A matrix providing a brief description of the interviewees can be found at Appendix E

4.3 Survey Participants

All participants were identified through contacts within the FRS, with the author's attendance on the Gold Command Course being particularly useful for establishing these links. This extended the network of contacts within Fire and Rescue Services across the UK and allowed for the identification of potential participants across a larger geographic foundation. Based on the general survey data acquired from the FRS participations, a basic typology of these individuals can be generated. The participants reported a range of tactical command experience, and all currently serve as a Gold Commander. Whilst these individuals maintain a variety of different job titles ranging from Assistant, Deputy and Chief Fire Officer, they are all Brigade Managers and their active role as Gold Commanders establishes their validity as

expert contributors for this investigation. Ultimately, all survey participants were provided with a general statement of objectives associated with this research process and willingly agreed to complete the survey in its entirety.

4.4 Ethical Concerns and Limitations

There are undeniably ethical concerns with the collection and analysis of primary data which relates to the particular responsibilities and job-specific behaviour of strategic leaders within the FRS, particularly when dealing with the limited numbers involved. Accordingly, steps were taken in order to mitigate exposure and limit the extent of individual data collected from the participants. For example, all participants were informed at the onset of the survey and interview process, that this was to be an anonymous investigation and that no specific data regarding name or location of appointment was to be collected. The online survey allowed the participants to complete the survey in their own time, allowing them to stop and resume at their leisure. Unfortunately, this became a disadvantage for the researcher, as it was apparent that two of the participants elected not to resume the survey. Ultimately, all survey participants agreed to complete this process of their own free will, and all responses are considered representative of open, honest, experience-based evidence. Whilst the interviews were particularly useful in demonstrating the broad range of opinion that existing Fire Gold Commanders have of their role, some comments were made 'off the record'. This has created difficulties for the researcher when presenting the outcome of some aspects of the interview

process, due to the fact that some comments could be easily attributable, given the specific context in which they are made. However, the researcher agreed at the outset that anonymity would be preserved, and has therefore made every effort not to present the findings or use quotes in a manner that might compromise individuals.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has introduced the research methods that were incorporated into the investigation of experience based evidence from Fire Gold Commanders. The mixed method approach is based on an opportunity to collect both group and individual based data streams, highlighting the perceptions held of the role. The scope of these questions is designed to focus on the achievement of the research aims and objectives. The following chapter will introduce the empirical evidence collected through this process and will address the complexities associated with multi-agency decision making and multi-level command operations in the Fire and Rescue Service.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter consists of three primary sections. First, basic demographic data regarding the relative qualifications and experience of the fifteen participants who took part in the survey is introduced. Subsequently, comprehensive presentation and review of the quantitative survey responses is conducted, highlighting a distinct phenomenon that continues to influence the Gold Commander role, its foundations, and opportunities for clearer definition. Finally, the supplemental participant responses to these quantitative queries are introduced, offering thematic analysis of the participant responses in order to identify consistent trends and standards which have emerged through this research. Interwoven throughout will be an evaluation of the interview responses, to further explore and consider trends and themes linked to the survey questions. Whilst this chapter will introduce and discuss the evidence generated over the course of the empirical research, the subsequent chapters will address, in detail, the findings of this investigation in relation to best fit practices and skills oriented strategies demanded by this key FRS position.

5.2 Quantitative Research Presentation

One of the primary objectives of this investigation was to identify perceptions held by Fire Gold Commanders of the particular skill sets and responsibilities which they associate with their position, in an effort to predict whether non-technical skills (i.e. leadership qualities, non-industry experience, etc.) were deemed to be sufficient for the assumption of command. In order to present the information in a consistent and coherent way the responses were grouped to enable effective trends analysis. The initial group of questions were designed to explore the perceptions of Gold Commanders of their role in relation to the operational or Bronze level of command. In asking these questions, the researcher sought to ascertain the degree of separation between the upper and lower tiers of the command structure when the FRS operates in the multi-agency context. Figure 4 highlights the first segment of quantitative statements offered to the survey participants. The results indicate that the majority perceive a fundamental difference in the perception of the decision making processes required for Gold and Bronze level commanders, as of the 15 participants, 13 were supportive of this conclusion. On the other hand, the participants were divided regarding the level of operational experience required by Gold Commanders, as only 9 suggested that these roles were totally different. In concert with such findings, 12 of the participants emphasised that the Gold Commander will not be making decisions operationally, whilst a similar number (12) argued that it is not necessary to maintain expertise in the operational segment in order to perform the role appropriately. Indeed one interviewee (F), considered that having operational

experience can be a distraction, as;

“There is a huge danger of the former firefighter ending up as a Gold Commander, because you can’t help but think about what’s going on down there (at the scene), and I suppose there is a compulsion amongst some of us to get involved and control that”.

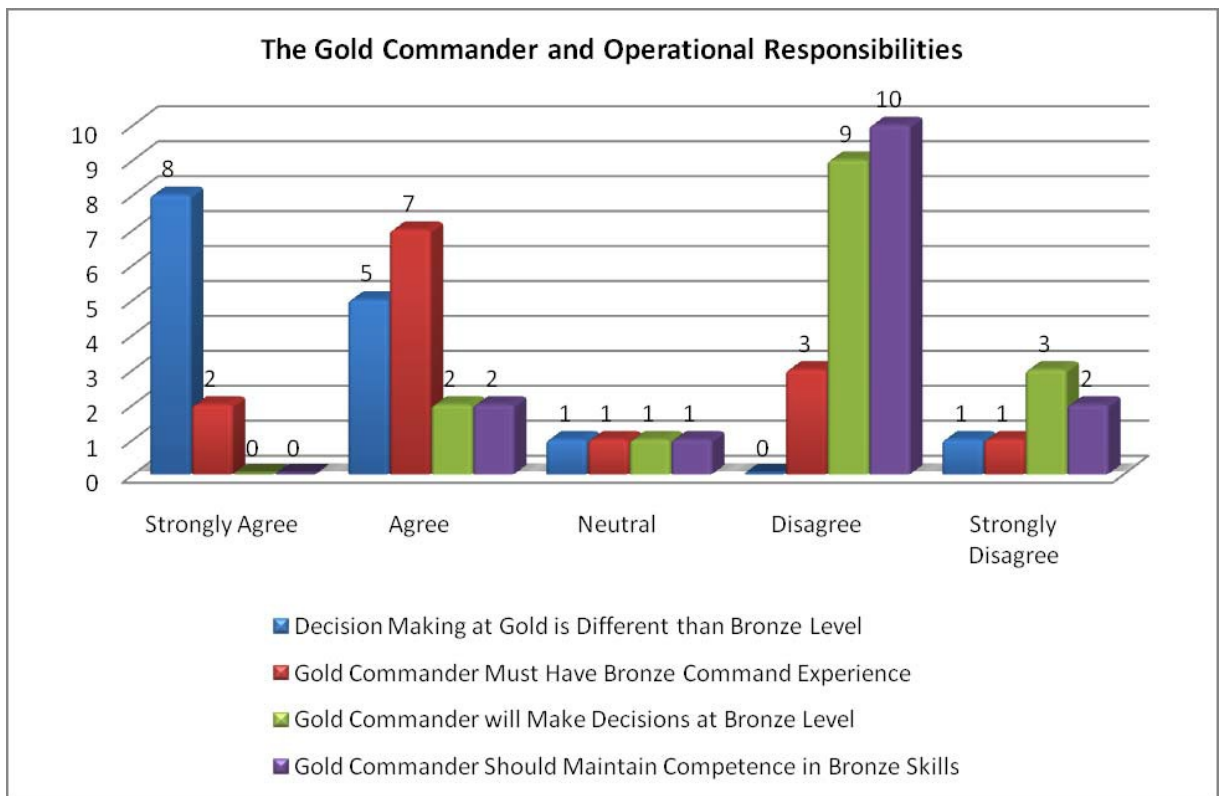


Figure 4: The Gold Commander and Operational (Bronze) Responsibilities

Analysis of the responses to these questions indicates some interesting anomalies particularly in regard to the requirement for experience and maintenance of competence, and it perhaps highlights the emotive link that many operational firefighters feel about their incident

response role, regardless of their position in the hierarchy of the organisation. This emotional attachment is unlikely to be felt by someone who has not experienced command at the Bronze or operational level. Whilst it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from this first segment of questions in isolation, it does demonstrate that the respondents have different perceptions of the role, which are wholly dependent on their individual viewpoint. The next set of questions will explore the relationship between the Silver and Gold Commander. Whilst operational competencies are but one area of FRS performance, a primary focus at an incident relates to the value of effective tactical decision making. Continuing the rationale designed for the previous set of questions, this grouping is intended to ascertain respondent's perception of their role relative to the tactical or Silver level of command. As has been seen from analysis of the guidance in an earlier chapter, the Gold Commander, by default, may assume responsibility for the outcome of tactical decisions; however, although they are infrequently the actual decision maker, the level of interaction will be more involved than in the previous segment. Figure 5 highlights participant responses regarding the dichotomy between Gold and Silver responsibilities. 13 of the survey participants believe that Gold decision making is fundamentally different than Silver decision making; however, 9 of the participants believe that Gold Commanders should have Silver experience in order to perform their current duties. In fact, 10 of the participants rejected the claim that Silver experience was not essential for Gold decision making, with 9 believing that Gold Commanders should maintain competence as tactical commanders. In comparison to Bronze, the narrower separation between the next levels of command inevitably necessitates a higher degree of interaction. This was reflected in the responses which indicate a far more substantial link between Gold and Silver decision making, than previously reported with Bronze level

decision making. Accordingly, analysis suggests that tactical decisions are of particular concern to Gold Commanders, establishing a tangible basis of the perception that experience or skill set training is required for interaction at this level.

However, an interviewee (F), when considering whether tactical experience was necessary for Gold Command, stated that;

“Those (Gold and Silver) qualities are entirely different, and I sometimes think people have difficulty separating them out”.

Another (D) commented that;

“You cannot be a Gold commander without having been a tactical commander, but the role at SCG is a coordinator role and completely different, this does not necessarily require tactical experience”.

These comments were echoed by other interviewees who consider that the Fire Gold Commander role is different from the person who attends the SCG, and there are clear differences of opinion about the dual aspect of the role, summed up by the following comment from another interviewee (A);

“I think this very issue is one that we do all meander around as we have all got different views”.

This further suggests that there is a need to provide greater clarity regarding the expectations and demands of the role, and this will be explored in greater detail in a subsequent chapter.

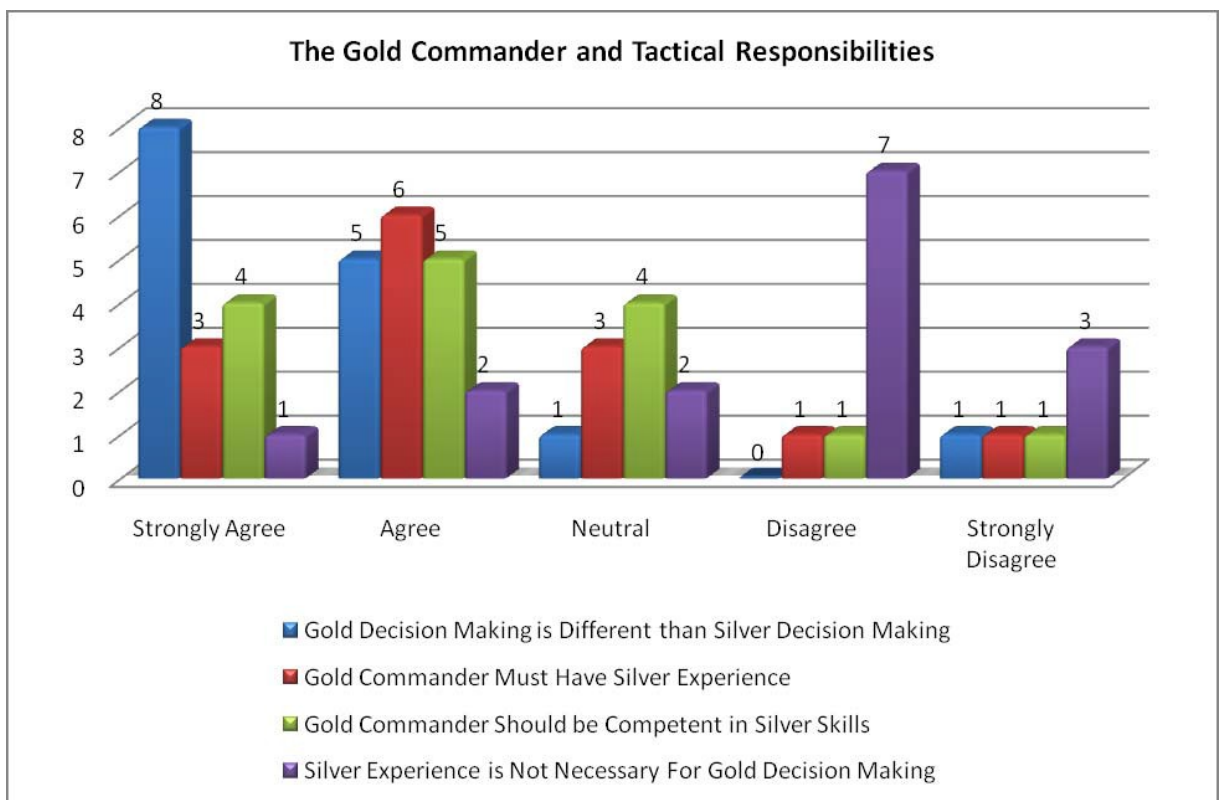


Figure 5: The Gold Commander and Tactical Responsibilities

In order to identify the perceptions of the breadth of Gold Commander influence and involvement in tactical decision making and activities, with explicit links to the previous set of questions, another group were presented to the survey participants. The seven questions (see figure 6) were linked in an attempt to highlight and identify the manifestation of tactical skills in the responsibilities of the Gold Commander. Consistent with the findings regarding

operational decision making, 12 of the survey participants reported that skills at the tactical level are different than those employed during Gold Command. As 9 of the participants reported that subsidiarity in decision making remains a constant, impactful variable, 13 recognised that Silver Commanders should retain the capacity for tactical plan amendments without Gold Commander direction. Further, only 2 of the participants believe that the Gold Commander should always sign off and approve the tactical plan, whilst just 4 suggest that Gold Commanders will be required to make decisions at the Silver level. This suggests that the requirement for tactical level knowledge and understanding is not clearly understood. Furthermore, considering that only 5 of the participants believe that Silver Command decisions will be challenged by Gold Commanders, the findings indicate a degree of separation between these two levels of responsibility. Whilst it is evident that from a conceptual perspective, Gold Commanders are expected to have an understanding of tactical decision making, the fact that only 4 of the participants believe that these professionals can operate without their tactical advisors, indicates an inherent distance between Gold and Silver. When asked whether they could operate at an SCG without a tactical advisor, one interviewee (A) said;

“You could do it, but you would be flying by the seat of your pants, part of that role is to take some of the pressures off the Gold Commander”.

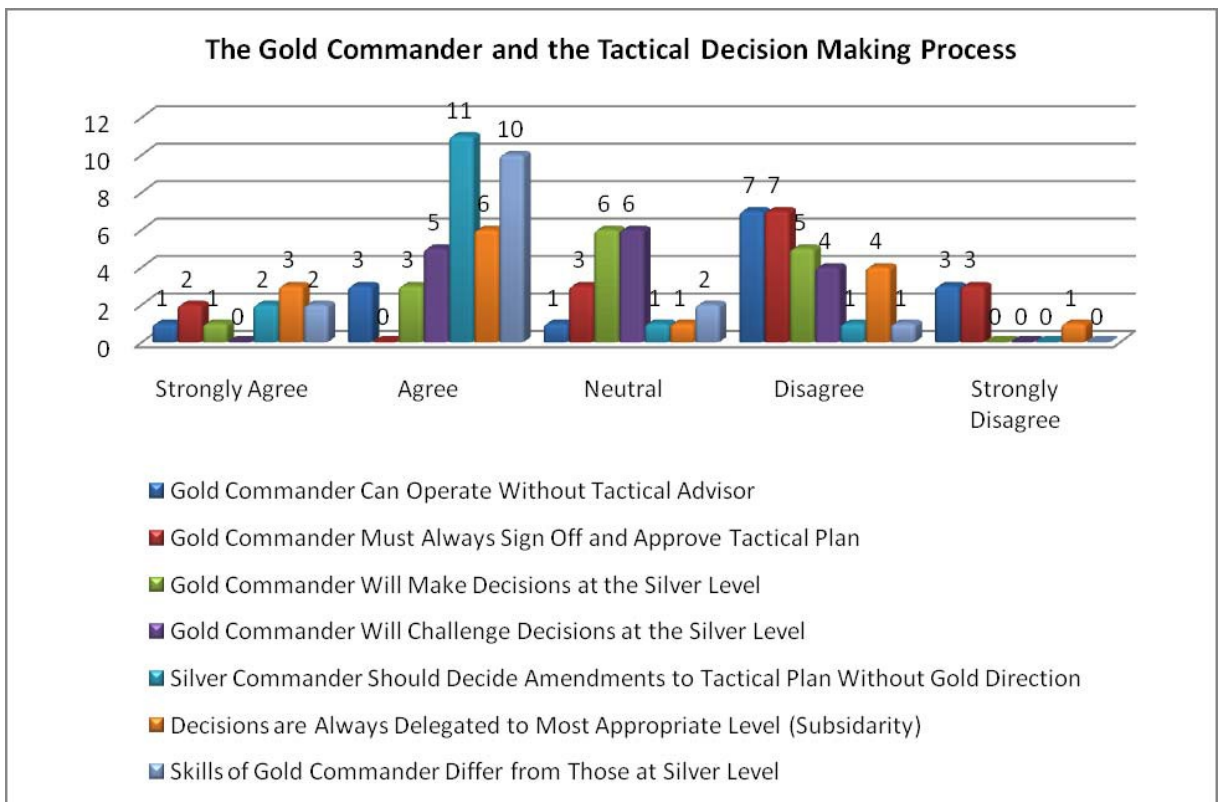


Figure 6: The Gold Commander and the Tactical Decision Making Process

Based on the findings to this point, it has become evident that Gold Commanders retain their own unique job responsibilities that are perceived as distant and non-transient when considering either Bronze or Silver decision making. However for some there is still a tendency to become involved in tactical and even operational level detail. This perhaps highlights the wide variance in understanding of the role, which may be dependent on matching the particular needs of each individual incident.

Figure 7 highlights the participant perspectives regarding the Gold Commander role and the manifestation of strategic leadership. The questions here were grouped in order to understand

the participant's perceptions of the considerations to be taken into account for strategic leaders who may enter the FRS as direct entrants and adopt the role of Gold Commander. The participants are ideologically split regarding the skill sets required for Gold Commanders and the direct promotion of strategic leaders to this position, as 8 felt that such appointed individuals would not have the necessary skills to perform the responsibilities. On the other hand, 10 of these participants believe that strategic leaders should be allowed to develop into the Gold Commander position. Of particular interest from an oversight perspective, 11 of the participants suggested that those Gold Commanders who are lacking in practical experience are less likely to participate in tactical decision making. A practical example of becoming unduly involved in inappropriate detail was emphasised by interviewee (F) who, reflecting on a major Gold level event planning exercise which involved an element of syndicate working, stated that;

“The police stopped us (FRS Gold Commanders) from getting too tactical, and their decision making was more strategic than ours, I think because they are more practised at it”.

However another interviewee (D) believed that possession of tactical knowledge is a distinct advantage and related the example of the Chief Fire Officer of Gloucestershire FRS, who decided to give the order to improvise the capability of the High Volume Pumps to provide a temporary drinking water supply to residents during the flooding of 2007, stating;

“The benefits of having that sort of tactical brain sitting around the strategic table are absolutely invaluable, and the fact that someone will occasionally drop down into the weeds - you just train it out of them”.

Finally, to identify any other hindrances in the achievement of Gold Commander position, cultural barriers were also considered, and 7 of the participants believe that various cultural barriers do undermine the pursuit of this level of responsibility, although it is suggested by interviewee (B) that the ‘glass ceiling’ has now been broken;

“Some things have to break through the glass ceiling for culture to change, and that is maybe how to change the culture of an organisation, there is no right or wrong, no rule books about it”.

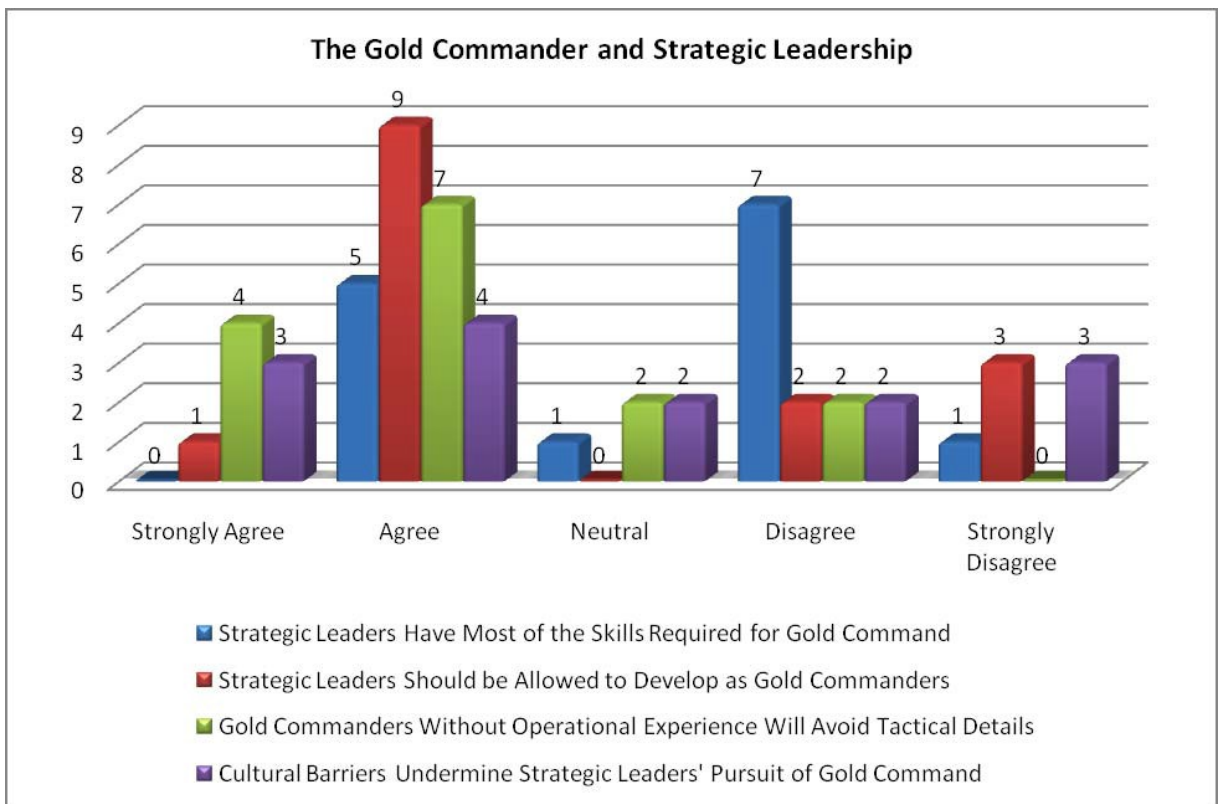


Figure 7: The Gold Commander and Strategic Leadership

In order to explore further the role of the Fire Gold Commander, several questions were redressed to the participants, highlighting particularities of these responsibilities. Figure 8 highlights the results of the participant answers to four particular skill segments. 10 of the participants believe that Gold Commanders must possess technical knowledge and understanding (with hindsight, this question relating to the importance of the possession of technical knowledge, may have been slightly vague and misleading), while 7 disagree with the argument that these Commanders must understand the tactical plan. Such findings return to the concept of distributed responsibility and decision making between Gold and Silver

Commanders. In order to identify deficiencies in the perceptions of tactical skill sets, 11 of the participants believe that Gold Commanders require support from a tactical officer, highlighting the views of the 8 respondents who indicated that the majority of Gold Commander skills are acquired in the non-operational field. In the opinion of interviewee (A), this lack of experience or operational exposure can be adequately fulfilled by a tactical advisor, as;

“The individual that goes to the SCG does not necessarily need to have been a ‘boots on the ground’ person, but they might need to access some ‘boots on the ground’ information”

Based on all reported findings, it is evident that Gold Commanders are not focused on practical skill sets; and instead, they are challenged to explore critical, performance based decisions on a broader plane of operation.

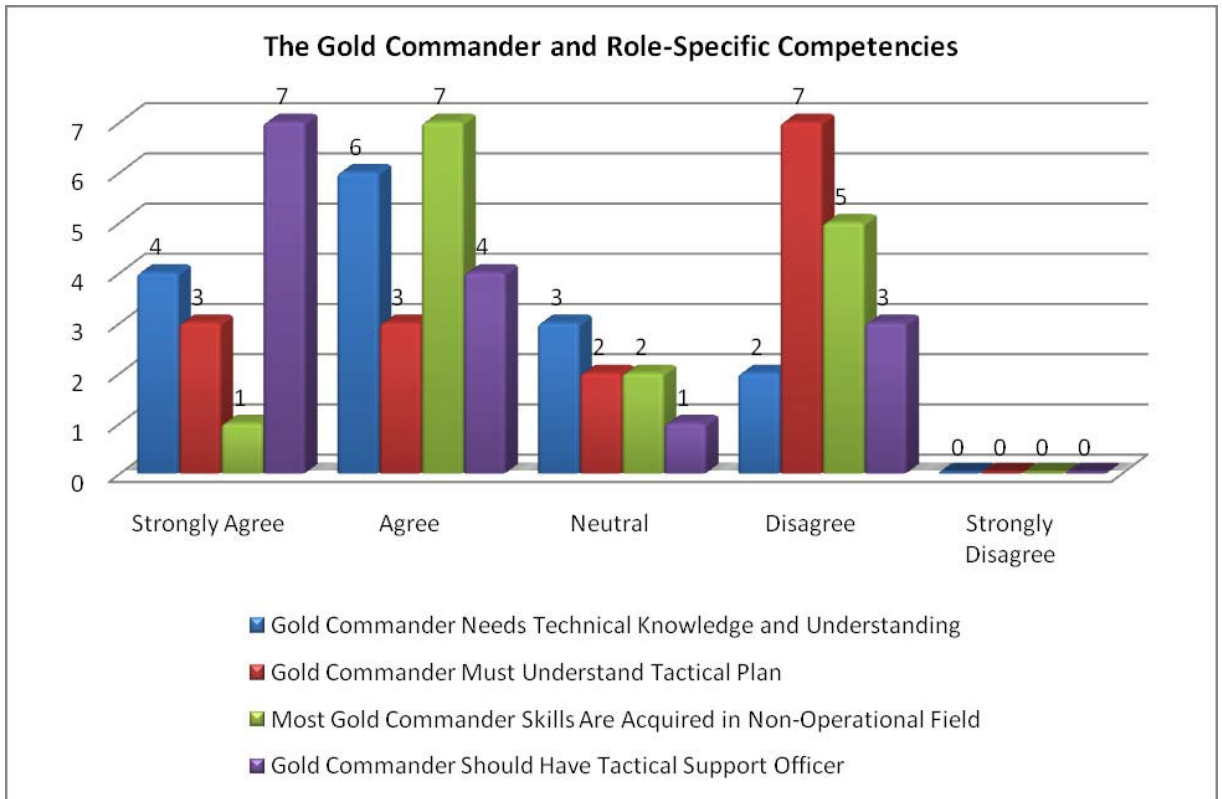


Figure 8: The Gold Commander and Role-Specific Competencies

5.3 Qualitative Findings

The survey participants were asked to expand upon their responses to the quantitative queries in order to generate a more in-depth analysis of the Gold Commander role within the FRS, the underlying skill sets associated with this position, and the controversial nature of promotion and leader placement. Whilst the responses were in-depth and relatively consistent, there are a variety of phenomena that have been identified through thematic analysis of the responses that will be addressed throughout this section. In order to limit the breadth of feedback presented from these participants, Appendix B features the responses in their entirety.

However, this section will address the key thematic elements of various queries in this survey segment and present relevant participant responses in order to further expand upon the concepts, ideals, and expectations associated with this current training and development dilemma.

5.4 Gold Commander Skill Sets and Training

In one of the initial questions in this survey, the participants were asked which of the training components (training courses, mentoring, observation, case studies) were considered the most valuable in preparation for Gold Commander status. Figure 7 highlights the dominant thematic elements of the participant responses, highlighting key areas in which consensus were offered across the entirety of the responses. Comparatively, the majority of participants felt that workplace experience, and in particular, crisis based experience, was a priority for all Gold Commanders. There were several valuable responses from these participants that highlight other segments of the Gold Commander skills sets and responsibilities that are likely to be under prepared during classroom or even scenario based training exercises:

“Whilst training is useful, it needs to be supported by experience of incident performance at all levels. The FRS is a tactical organisation, Gold command is only necessary at multi-agency incidents, therefore the FRS Gold representative must understand tactical operations”.

“All of these methods have their place in a suite of experiential learning that I believe is necessary to deliver the final outcome. I have chosen observation only on the basis that much is learnt from observation from incidents at all levels. These experiences provide a toolbox for managing major incidents where you are the person on the spot. The toolbox also includes your character, communication skills, relationship management and other emotional intelligence areas”.

The model in Figure 9 demonstrates the areas in which individuals operate within the role map at the strategic level. Several respondents suggested that direct participation and training in the multi-agency requirements of the Gold Commander position would ultimately benefit their overall performance. What is evident within the model which is designed to indicate the extent of Gold Command responsibility is that the primary foundation of this position, multi-agency liaising, can be a secondary role alongside the interaction with tactical commanders, a view reinforced by a number of the interviewees.



Figure 9: Thematic Model for Achievement of Gold Command Status

As the training and development model identified by the survey participants, and suggested above, includes key ingredients such as experience and simulated training, the nature of decision making and the standard definition of a Gold Commander, particularly one without tactical or operational experience, is called into question. The survey participants emphasise that Gold Command should be about strategy and leadership; however, several suggest that due to the specialised nature of this appointment as well as the potential for tactical level demands under potentially extreme conditions, experience is a prerequisite for promotion to the Gold Commander level. The following are relevant comments that highlight the general participant consensus:

“The ability to work in an immediate pressurised environment, where decisions can be made within minutes and turned into success or failure, only occurs through effective training and experience which isn’t normally part of a strategic leader’s experience. They will also need to have reasonable organisational knowledge and contextual understanding to operate effectively”.

“The one ability that I’ve witnessed as being difficult to extract from those that have never been in an emergency operational environment is the making of a decision without full information (as unavailable) and without too much prevarication”.

Interviewee (C) also referred to the fact that not all representatives at the SCG are used to ‘speedy decision making’. However when asked to give an example of Gold decision making timescales, they stated the following;

“At the SCG Gold Command table there’s not that much urgency, but it’s certainly ‘ok then folks we need to decide, are we going to evacuate or not?’. We then get information in, speak to etc etc, so probably within an hour if you like, we need to decide whether we are going to evacuate in perhaps half an hour. So I give that as an example of where you need a pretty quick decision at the Gold Command table, but it’s not an immediate decision, there will be opportunity for discussion”.

This further suggests that for existing Fire Gold Commanders their perception of the role differs from the expectations contained within the guidance they are provided with, as '*the time frame for Gold, or strategic command, is in days rather than hours or minutes*' (Home Office, 2008, p. 16).

There is a general consensus that the support of the tactical advisor is a much needed means of optimising the decision making process; however, it is evident that given the expectations placed upon the Gold Commander, strategic decisions sometimes require complex understanding of tactical organisation and objectives, but this is likely to be dependent on the incident type. Considering the FRS (Home Office, 2008) guidance regarding the Gold Command responsibilities, there is a fundamental expectation that situational risk analyses and the setting of tactical objectives are defined and activated according to best fit conditions of likelihood and impact mitigation. Given the potential for the criticality of Gold Command decisions, the survey participants have suggested that time sensitivity and resource complications determine that Gold Commanders should be experienced in some form of crisis management. Whilst there is widespread agreement that there are particular leadership and situational management skills that should also be maintained by effective Gold Commanders, it is evident that there is a presupposition that these skills will be in support of other tactical and operational competencies. One comment from the survey participants essentially sums up this dichotomy as follows:

“Many of the skills needed for Gold Command can be gained without operational experience. A deep understanding of what it means to command an emergency service cannot. It is simply not the same working in non-emergency oriented sectors. My experience at LRF Gold training events has demonstrated this to me on numerous occasions”.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of a primary data questionnaire that was administered to currently operating Gold Commanders. The overwhelming consensus in this feedback emphasises the perception held of the value of experience, particularly in tactical scenarios, for Gold Command decision making. While alternative support strategies (i.e. tactical advisors) have been introduced to provide a support function, the results of this investigation also highlight the perceptions held of inherent cognitive and intuitive limitations associated with non-experiential decision making. This has led to many participants believing that the response of an uninitiated Commander is likely to be much different from that of a seasoned tactical operative. The following chapters will discuss this phenomenon in more detail, highlighting opportunities for defining a best fit standard for the Fire Gold Command role.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Analysis

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the primary data retrieved from existing Gold Commanders currently operating within the FRS. These findings indicate the precedence of experience which is highly valued and recommended for the Fire Gold Command role, with many of the participants citing their own operational experience in some capacity over the past 15 years, suggesting a bias towards such experiential learning. To circumvent this process and succeed at Gold Command is obviously an unrealistic capability in the eyes of these Commanders. This chapter will address this concept in more detail, applying the literature and case study findings to a deeper analysis of the primary data results.

6.2 Decision Making and Operational Experience

The evidence presented in the Background chapter regarding FRS protocol places the Gold Commander into a strategic position, and in direct liaison with other partner agencies. For Buncefield and the 2007 floods, it was evident that under such conditions, tactical experience and operational knowledge were minimal prerequisites compared to the wider coordination role undertaken by these Commanders. Findings from the DCLG (2008) indicated that due to

extreme unpredictability in the 2007 flooding, the consequences of reactive resource allocation included non-responsiveness and uncoordinated distribution of rescue services. Given the magnitude of events, it is hardly surprising that the strategic efforts of the Gold Commander proved somewhat challenging in these circumstances. However, post-recovery analysis of the Gold Commander decision making indicates a widely successful rescue initiative given the scope and requirements of the coordinated efforts.

In academia, researchers such as Crichton and Flin (2001, p.258) have explored the nature of emergency responses, highlighting the particularities associated with crisis mitigation and strategic decision making. Their findings indicate that preparedness for emergency events of any major scale is generally deficient, requiring much more extensive pre-training and role-playing activities in order to prescribe more optimal decision making. Whilst it has been stated that Fire Gold Commanders have limited opportunities for exposure to Gold level incidents, realistic training events are therefore of paramount significance. A range of opportunities exist to provide these Commanders with the necessary exposure. The Gold Command course hosted at the Fire Service College (FSC), and the Multi Agency Gold Incident Command (MAGIC) course (NPIA, 2011), jointly developed by the FSC and the NPIA, are specifically designed to develop and maintain competence in Gold Command. These courses are supplemented by the Gold Standard Course, a Cabinet Office approved course, which is being developed jointly with the Emergency Planning College at Easingwold (SELEX, 2011). All of the courses are designed to immerse strategic command decision makers into the crisis environment through simulation, with learning embedded through effective debrief, and reflective self analysis. In accordance with the findings from the Gold

Commanders in this investigation, and given the complexities of the command role assumed during crisis conditions, such practical training programmes which are designed to hone decision making skills, are essential for enhancing command preparedness. What is clear from this research is that as the professional understanding of the domain is developed, the role of the Fire Gold Commander will continue to be defined. Another step on this journey will be provided through the introduction of the newly developed draft vocational qualification for Fire Gold Command, and further clarity and consistency will be afforded to the role.

6.3 Gold Commander and Strategy

Fit for purpose commanders must be able to incorporate both intuitive and explicit knowledge streams, implementing decisions to optimise the achievement of incident objectives. Pomerol (2001, p.200) defines this cognitive process as '*pruning*' in which leaders are challenged to engage case based reasoning prior to decision making, limiting the potential outcomes of a given scenario through experiential and knowledge driven evidence. Such cognition relies upon experience as a bounding factor, restricting the related outcome '*branches*' in a given event tree to those which are plausible and most likely. Vanharanta and Easton (2010, p.427) define this process as recognition primed decision making (RPDM), a concept previously addressed in relation to FRS (Home Office, 2008) analysis of fire command skill sets and decision making practices. The authors recognise that due to the immediacy of some

decisions, responses may be developed on the basis of entirely intuitive practices, focusing on the goals of a given scenario and initiating the best response to achieve these goals (Vanharanta and Easton, 2010, p.428). The most important aspect of this decision making model, however, is experience, a prerequisite for accuracy in the intuitive process, and a foundation that it has been widely recognised within this analysis that Gold Commanders should possess.

The question still remains however, whether expert level training and education should be recognised as sufficient in ensuring that Gold Commanders are adequately prepared to deal with crisis response conditions. Chauvin et al. (2009, p.1223) argue that experts are inherently flexible and that they are able to adapt to ambiguous, changing, and complex environments because they are able to respond to the characteristics of a situation. Accordingly, the authors suggest that through the prescription of strategic decision making programmes, the competencies of expert leaders (with and without experience) can be oriented towards optimum decision making. Conversely, empirical evidence suggests that the acquisition of sufficient knowledge and response competencies through academic training is extremely difficult to achieve in the absence of the actual experience based conditioning that expert decision makers possess. An individual in a role who is in development and who has not experienced a complex situation may be unable to react properly, as knowledge of regulations and standards alone may be insufficient to prescribe safe decisions under crisis conditions (Chauvin et al., 2009, p.1230). This would tend to uphold the perceptions held by existing Fire Gold Commanders, who emphasise tactical and operational experience as valuable components for ensuring proficient decision making.

6.4 Summary

This chapter has addressed the complexity of decision making under crisis conditions and has aligned the primary data results with academic analysis. Examination of the guidance prescribed for the Fire Gold Commander regarding required competencies, suggests that there is some confusion whether a prerequisite of experience or at least a degree of awareness, in an operational and tactical capacity is necessary to perform the role. This broadly echoes the comments made by participants, but it is the degree to which it is necessary which is open to interpretation. There are clearly differences of opinion and a lack of clarity which suggests a need for clearer definition of the role. The final chapters of this dissertation will conclude these results and offer recommendations for future development.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Conclusions

Primary data obtained from existing Fire Gold Commanders indicates a lack of consensus amongst the survey participants regarding their role. This research has explored this phenomenon and attempted to answer the research questions by focusing on the following research objectives:

Research Objective 1

- To conduct a critical review of Fire Gold Command, in order to determine the requirements of the role, and its context within the FRS.

Completed

The background to the development of the role was explored to provide context to the role of the Gold Commander, as prescribed by the FRS (Home Office, 2008), and it was found that this guidance does not explicitly identify tactical or operational experience as a prerequisite for decision making. Instead, the foundation for this responsibility is based on long term impact analysis, organisation reputation protection, strategic risk aversion, and multi-agency

coordination under complex, variable conditions. In the protocol defined by Sussex Police (2010), evidence is seen of explicit attention to Gold Commander specifications, training, and competency objectives. This police guidance clearly identifies the responsibilities for the Police Gold role, and whilst such standards are currently detailed within the National Occupational Standards (EFSM1 and CCAG1) for senior fire officers, the lack of a more cohesive, foundation protocol is a detriment to the FRS.

Research Objective 2

- To perform an analysis of data collected from primary research that focuses on the perceptions of experienced Fire Gold Commanders, in order to evaluate if this understanding reflects the guidance currently provided.

Completed

This objective focused on analysis of the survey data, and from one perspective, the primary and secondary evidence presented within this research emphasises the perceptions held by existing Gold Commanders, of the inherent value of experience in the foundation of intuitive and recognition primed decision making. On the other hand, leadership and other non-technical skill sets, visionary system analysis, and targeted strategy design are all key components of the Gold Commander standard that are in the main positioned above the tactical level. What is most evident in the findings of this investigation is that a precedence of

generality has been applied to the role of the Fire Gold Commander, one which builds upon a broad spectrum of agency guidance (i.e. HSE, NPIA, HSWA, HMG, etc.) yet fails to identify key standards that provide commanders with a more comprehensive understanding of their role. In the FRS guidance (Home Office, 2008, p.119) for example, it is suggested that all personnel at all levels should use the decision making model to assist their risk assessment, which should be based on Generic Risk Assessments (GRAs). These offer all commanders the opportunity to formulate a foundation for more dynamic risk assessment (DRA) according to standard operating procedures (SOPs). The understanding and application of this concept may initially be considered relatively straightforward. However, dependent on the complexity, the challenges for Fire Gold Commanders in applying the decision making model, are exacerbated by a relative lack of situational awareness due to the remoteness of their position from the incident. Indeed, the role of a Fire Gold Commander is quite different from that of a Police Gold Commander, who has greater involvement in tactical command level decisions. For Fire Gold Commanders, this similarity cannot be considered constant, and therefore best fit decision making will ultimately rely upon intuitive empirical interpretation based on RPD, rather than protocol or explicit procedures. Such insight does not discount the complexity of the Police Gold Commander strategic decision making process; it simply suggests that such complexity in the FRS is exacerbated depending on the nature of the incident.

Many of the survey participants have suggested that the FRS is a tactical organisation, requiring Gold Commanders to have sufficient practical knowledge of tactical considerations in order to make appropriate responses. The 1st and 2nd editions of the Incident Command

Manual (1999, 2002) do not make specific reference to the 'Fire Gold' Commander, reflecting the situation prior to the emphasis on more effective integrated emergency management, and interoperability. Indeed the term 'Fire Gold' Commander as stated in the 3rd edition of the Manual (Home Office, 2008), is not found in other guidance such as Emergency Response and Recovery (Cabinet Office, 2009). Given that the guidance for the role does not indicate that the Fire Gold Commander is expected to make command decisions in the same manner as their Police counterpart, it is no wonder that there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding the role. The Gold Commander role is expected to define and establish strategy whilst simultaneously coordinating communication and planning. However, the participants have suggested that without an awareness of situational variability (experiential) and tactical understanding (trained and learned) to facilitate such initiatives, it is unlikely that the Gold Commander could achieve effective decision making. Whilst evidence collected by multiple agencies in post-recovery analysis following each of these crises has demonstrated exemplary performance and well-structured successes, the coordinated crisis mitigation revolves around an integrated system in which Gold, Silver, and Bronze level commanders remain committed to singular objectives. If tactically experienced Silver commanders are not able to define these objectives without interference, according to a hierarchical command structure, there is the potential for confusion. Therefore, Gold Commanders must be able to internalise conditions and cues and maintain a strategic overview without becoming tactically focused. Notwithstanding this, the ability to support the Silver commander in their role will be entirely limited to the Gold Commander's effectiveness at recognising validity in the development of their tactical plan. Accordingly, the findings of this investigation demonstrate that practical experience and training is perceived by existing Gold Commanders

as an essential, fundamental prerequisite for excellence in the role. Based on the ongoing evolution of the integrated emergency management environment in which the Fire Gold Commander is expected to operate, it is evident that adjustments should be made in order to evaluate the degree to which operational or tactical level experience, should be balanced against expert managerial competencies, and strategic decision making abilities.

Research Objective 3

To further understand the role by identifying issues which impacted upon the Fire Gold Commander, in the context of two national multi-agency incidents: Buncefield, and the 2007 flooding in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.

Completed

The crises at Buncefield and the 2007 floods were mitigated as a direct result of proficient strategic decision making on the part of a standardised crisis response initiative, which emphasises the integrated emergency response protocol. It is clear that the uncertain and highly volatile conditions of the Buncefield incident and the 2007 floods, demanded a degree of tactical knowledge, which provided the primary mechanism for risk mitigation and prioritisation of the response efforts. Coordinating multiple sector based activities required a complex interpretation of the scenario and potential outcomes associated with the decision making process, and in the main this was undertaken at the scene. A complex incident is likely to present a challenge to any commander, regardless of their experience and technical

ability, particularly if it is an unprecedented event such as Buncefield. Indeed, the Buncefield incident required tactical innovation, and the synthesis of unique solutions utilising the expertise of national and international experts to successfully resolve it. During this incident, the Fire Gold Commander dealt with the wider strategic issues, but also provided remote support to the Silver Commander on scene, a relationship embedded on a high degree of trust and empathy (Yates, 2011). This inter-personal relationship emphasises the non-technical as well as technical skill components of the respective roles, and perhaps highlights the unwritten elements of command.

Two research questions were posed as follows:

- 1 Does the current guidance adequately define the Fire Gold Command role?

No (Qualified)

Analysis of the primary data obtained for this research highlights the lack of clear agreement regarding role definition, although many survey participants have indicated the difficulty in providing clarity for the complete range of incidents likely to require an SCG. It is also apparent that for some participants, the current descriptors for the role further add to the confusion. In the researcher's opinion this question cannot be simply answered because it is possible that the definition of the role must be considered against the context of the incident type. Further development of the guidance should provide greater clarity, but it is unlikely

that the more definitive role attributed to the Police Gold can ever be assigned within a tactically focused organisation, such as the FRS.

- 2 Do the competence requirements for Fire Gold Command vary according to the type of incident?

Yes

Question 2 clearly links to question 1, and the overwhelming evidence suggests that for certain types of incident, a high degree of tactical knowledge and understanding would be beneficial.

The hypothesis for this research was *'that the structured guidance provided for Fire Gold Command does not correlate with the perceptions of some of the individuals who currently undertake the role'*.

In the final analysis it is considered that the answers to the research questions are consistent with the hypothesis. The next chapter will offer recommendations to further enhance the role based on the findings of this research.

Chapter 8: Recommendations

8.1 Recommendations

This investigation has revealed that the uncertain nature of complex crises is a fundamental component likely to have an impact upon the efficacy of the Fire Gold Commander's decision making. As the response to such incidents will be outside the scope of the majority of these individual's experience, it is proposed that there are opportunities to consider the development of potential Fire Gold Commanders regardless of their previous experiences. The current direction is good, and it signifies that the role is continuing to evolve and be re-defined, with lessons learnt from events being incorporated into the training regimes. The aforementioned courses (ICGC, MAGIC) are aimed at developing Gold Commanders, and although there is an identified development programme for Fire Gold Commanders, it varies according to each individual FRS, as the programme is elective and not mandatory. Whilst the courses offer valuable training and education opportunities for Gold Commanders in development, the findings of this investigation suggest that the role should be further defined in order to ensure competence and proficiency for all likely scenarios.

The review of the Sussex (2010) training initiatives and the guidance provided by the NPIA (2009) demonstrates how protocol and a standardised definition of expectations, can provide a valuable resource for Police Gold Commanders. As many of the survey participants cited encroachment onto tactical initiatives as a particularly challenging aspect of Gold

Commander efforts, it is evident that the clarity of purpose and role has yet to be universally defined. The continual development of the GSB model provides greater multi-agency interoperability according to similar hierarchical protocol, reducing confusion and limiting situational debates regarding roles and responsibilities. Yet Fire Gold Commanders are expected to make strategic decisions that will ultimately impact Silver and Bronze Commanders. The inevitability of overlap has been evidenced, however, the solution to the problem of role definition, and the disparity of understanding of the role according to the perceptions of the survey participants is not. Accordingly, it is recommended that a review of the role of Fire Gold Commander is undertaken, to ensure evolution and rehabilitation of the standard. The review should at least consider the following:-

Prioritise: The responsibilities of the Fire Gold Commander should be reviewed and prioritised in order to ensure that there is a clear emphasis on the strategic objectives of a given crisis as articulated within Police guidance. Whilst such standards are in place in practice, the lack of formality including such guidelines as administration, communication, support, interoperability, have yet to be clearly defined.

Lead: Leadership is essential for individuals in an upper tier strategic capacity, and Gold Commanders must be trained in order that they are able to provide effective leadership that achieves optimum performance from their tactical counterparts. A review of the leadership component of this role should be undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of current national direction and coordination. The outcome of this

review should focus on achieving consistency across the UKFRS, to ensure exemplification of the Fire Gold Command standard.

Validate: The interests of communities and the FRS are paramount, and the expectations and demands placed upon the individual undertaking the role of Fire Gold Commander should be clearly understood and demonstrated in application. A process for the validation of Fire Gold Commanders should be developed for the UKFRS, which encompasses the vocational qualifications and provides an assessment of the competence of the individual who performs the role. Ultimately, a nationally developed protocol such as this could improve strategic decision making and ensure that impacts are minimised.

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Appendix A: Participation Query Letter

Thank you for taking part in this research.

- The purpose of this interview is to understand your views on the role of the Gold Commander, and whether you think the role should be more clearly defined. I'm particularly interested in whether you believe there is a need to have developed technical knowledge and understanding, which has been gained from experience of operating at the tactical and operational level.
- I am also keen to gain an appreciation of your opinion on whether it is possible to use experience gained from outside the emergency service environment in order to operate satisfactorily as a Fire Gold Commander.
- Your responses will not be attributed to you – but they will form the basis of a trend analysis. As I am only considering the views of senior officers of the Fire and Rescue Service, the opportunities for research are limited. Accordingly, I would like to give you my assurance that your responses will be considered appropriately in order to respect your confidence.

- There are no model answers, as I am merely interested in your opinions and developing an understanding of your personal experiences. Please feel free to interrupt at any time to confirm what I am asking.

- Finally, please be aware that I intend to record this interview, in order to ensure that I have an accurate record of your responses.

May I take some **personal details** first?

Name:

Current rank:

Current role:

Experience of Gold Command

1. What personal experience do you have of undertaking the role of Fire Gold Commander?
2. How have you acquired the skills necessary to undertake the role of a Fire Gold Commander?
3. In your opinion, what makes an effective Fire Gold Commander?
4. In your opinion, what makes an ineffective Fire Gold Commander?
5. What are the issues which in your opinion might influence the effectiveness of a Fire Gold Commander?

6. What are the differences between the requirements for an effective Fire Gold Commander operating at an SCG, compared with a strategic manager leading an FRS on a day to day basis?
7. Would you be comfortable operating at Gold without support?
8. Would you expect to have a Gold Support Officer (or team) working alongside you, and what purpose would you expect the role/function to fulfil?
9. Do you believe that it is essential for a Fire Gold Commander to have experienced tactical and operational command?
10. As a Fire Gold Commander, have you ever had to intervene or challenge tactical level decisions?
11. What are the training implications for the development of direct entrants who assume the role of Fire Gold Commander?
12. Finally, may I ask whether you have any other observations that have not been covered in this interview, that you would like to make regarding the role, particularly whether you believe tactical or operational experience is necessary for strategic command,

Thank you very much for giving up your time to help me.

Appendix B: Quantitative Results from Participant Survey

The Questions		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		1	2	3	4	5
8	The decision making skills required at Gold are significantly different to the requirement at Operational (BRONZE) level	8	5	1	0	1
9	The decision making skills required at Gold are significantly different to the requirement at Tactical (SILVER) level	8	5	1	0	1
10	The Gold Commander requires a high degree of technical knowledge and understanding, to be effective in their decision making	4	6	3	2	0
11	The Gold Commander must have Operational (BRONZE) command experience	2	7	2	3	1
12	The Gold Commander will be involved with decision making at the Operational (BRONZE) level	0	2	1	9	3
13	The Gold Commander must have Tactical (SILVER) Command experience	3	6	4	1	1
14	The Gold Commander should maintain competence as an Operational (BRONZE) Commander	0	2	1	10	2
15	The Gold Commander should maintain competence as a Tactical (SILVER) Commander	4	5	4	1	1
16	Tactical (SILVER) command experience is not necessary for effective decision making at GOLD level	1	2	2	7	3
17	The Gold Commander must always have a comprehensive understanding of the tactical plan	3	3	2	7	0
18	Most of the skills needed for effective Gold Command are acquired in a non-operational environment	1	7	2	5	0
19	The Gold Commander can operate effectively without a Gold Support	1	3	1	7	3

	Officer (TACTICAL advisor)					
20	The Gold Commander should always have a support officer to provide tactical advice	7	4	1	3	0
21	The Gold Commander must always sign off and approve the tactical plan	2	0	3	7	3
22	The Gold Commander will be involved with decision making at the Tactical (SILVER) level	1	3	6	5	0
23	The Gold Commander will often be required to challenge decisions made at the Tactical (SILVER) level	0	5	6	4	0
24	The Tactical (SILVER) Commander should determine the detail of amendments to the tactical plan, without direction from GOLD	2	11	1	1	0
25	During a major incident, decisions are ALWAYS delegated down to the most appropriate level (subsidiarity principle)	3	6	1	4	1
26	The skills required of the Gold Commander are significantly different from the requirement at Tactical (SILVER) level	2	10	2	1	0
27	Strategic leaders without operational experience will have developed most of the skills required for effective Gold Command	0	5	2	7	1
28	Strategic leaders without operational experience should be given the opportunity to develop as Gold Commanders	1	9	0	2	3
29	Gold Commanders without operational experience will be less inclined to get unnecessarily involved in detail at the Tactical (SILVER) level	4	7	2	2	0
30	Cultural barriers make it difficult for strategic leaders without operational experience to become Gold commanders	3	4	2	2	3

Appendix C: Qualitative Results from Participants Survey

	Q6B
	In your opinion, which one of the following is the most effective method of preparing for Gold Command?
1	My development programme has served me well - it included training courses but also observation of incidents, service delivery familiarisation, and simulation testing. My Masters work also has given me excellent additional background
2	+ providing command support to a gold incident
3	All are important but increasing command span or level of command authority is best done through incremental steps from the most basic level through to Gold.
4	training should be multi-agency
5	Experience in lower roles is vital
6	I believe all four of the above have an important role in preparing for Gold Command. It is also important to build relationships within your area so that you have awareness of colleagues from other SCG services
7	I feel its a combination of all
8	Whilst training is useful, it needs to be supported by experience of incident performance at all levels. The FRS is a tactical organisation, Gold command is only necessary at multi-agency incidents, therefore the FRS gold representative must understand tactical operations.
9	In-depth knowledge of own org and of needs of multi-agency partners. However gained
10	All of these methods have their place in a suite of experiential learning that I believe is necessary to deliver the final outcome. I have chosen observation only on the basis that much is learnt from observation from incidents at all levels. These experiences provide a toolbox for managing major incidents where you are the person on the spot. The toolbox also includes your character, communication skills, relationship management and other emotional intelligence areas.
11	All are important
12	The answer is really all of the above. On the job training invaluable as the occasions are so few and far between.

13	
14	
15	And 20+ years experience of incident command at various levels
	Q7B
	The decision making skills required at Gold are significantly different to the requirement at Operational (BRONZE) level
1	the role to be fulfilled is significantly different and the decisions to be made are very different too. Some argue the difference is focused on tempo and risk; it is not that simplistic, it is more about the skills you need to deploy in the different environments and the scope of the strategic decisions being made. Pace and risk can be very high at gold, it just feels different
2	Decisions at Gold level are more strategic and less dynamic than Bronze, focused more on strategy, planning, finances and resources (in the wider non-tactical deployment sense)
3	Gold is less time pressured and has no live other agency role
4	Unfortunately I believe the question is flawed in that the skills are the same, i.e. analyse, assess, create options, implement, monitor, etc. but their application is different dependent on the prevailing situation.
5	N.A.
6	The needs of gold is greater than most bronze commanders but bronze can have large requirements
7	Strategic decision making by its very nature is completely different to operational decision making. Setting desired outcomes within tactical parameters whilst securing resources for high level and long term coordination differs from operational decision making at bronze level. That said experience of decision making at both bronze and silver levels with a greater understanding of resource capability and incident impact is useful for Gold Command.
8	Different perspective required
9	Decision making skills are the same in any dynamic situation only the time constraints differ, the skills and to what level they need to be applied might differ
10	Broader understanding of total incident resolution required beyond needs of own service
11	Gold incidents by their nature whether they are a single agency major incident or multi-agency major incident require a greater level of interaction with other agencies and stakeholders and require a more strategic thinking process that includes issues like causal relationships, political awareness etc
12	N.A.
13	Bronze is fairly service and incident specific, Gold is a far broader canvas on which

	to work.
14	There is less emphasis on commanding and controlling and more emphasis on relationships and long term planning toward recovery.
15	The decision making skills are broadly similar, i.e. taking information from a number of sources, considering that information and then coming to a conclusion. The(sic) difference between the two is the level.
16	Gold Commander needs to take account of the longer term effects of the incident and return to normality
	Q8B
	The decision making skills required at Gold are significantly different to the requirement at Tactical (SILVER) level
1	as above really
2	Decisions at Gold level are more strategic and less dynamic than Silver, focused more on strategy, planning, finances and resources (in the wider non-tactical deployment sense) - Silver would still be deployed at the incident or silver control more locally based.
3	Gold is less time pressured and invokes other agencies strategy
4	See comments above
5	
6	The difference is smaller
7	As Above
8	As above, although some cross over
9	As 1
10	Broader understanding of Multi-agency total incident resolution required beyond tactical response options
11	Silver is forward looking at dealing with the incident and often a Gold commander will not be concerned about how the incident is being dealt with rather what the resources that are required? what is the impact on the community? what is impact on service resilience. A bronze or Silver will say I need these resources to fight the fire the Gold will say what resources do we need and what is the impact?
12	
13	Silver is still very much a command role where as Gold is far more persuasion,

	influence and politics.
14	Tactical decisions generally centre on what has worked successfully before whereas Gold decision making has rarely been undertaken and there is less opportunity to rely on the same decision from a similar experience.
15	see above
16	As above
	Q9B
	The Gold Commander requires a high degree of technical knowledge and understanding, to be effective in their decision making
1	but you do need excellent sector knowledge, and good technical awareness which I view as different from detailed knowledge. Indeed there are so many new pieces of equipment etc that it would be unrealistic for Gold Commanders to have high degrees of technical knowledge in all areas and in fact this can become a distractor(sic) from them undertaking the role they are to discharge as strategic commander for the organisation
2	Technical skills in their own Service area, as well as wider partnership working and influencing skills are essential.
3	i believe there are justified benefits to understand the terminology and the Tactical objectives of silver
4	Technical knowledge can be at hand through a staff officer.
5	
6	In a fire service terms I believe there is considerable need for this
7	I believe technical knowledge and understanding supports better decision making at a strategic level.
8	can be supported by someone with this knowledge
9	The need is to understand the FRS capability, what is achievable (and what is not) and what time frame it can be achieved in.
10	Not knowing what they don't know can mean that strategic options will be missed or undervalued. This will not prevent successful resolution but will preclude the most effective.
11	This will depend upon the circumstances of the role which will be different at a SCG than a single agency incident. The SCG can be about agreeing multi-agency objectives with no impact on service but a single service incident is more technical in nature
12	
13	Assuming the technical knowledge relates to service specific requirements of how to put out the fire quell te(sic) flood this can be dealt with in a different way. If it is technical knowledge around how the LRF operates and how politics works etc. then yes.
14	This can come from others in a supporting role at Gold

15	Depending on the incident they do not need technical knowledge but the ability to take knowledge from those that do have it e.g tactical advisor and then apply, which will require a degree of understanding
16	
	Q10B
	The Gold Commander must have Operational (BRONZE) command experience
1	Not necessary, it can even end up being a hindrance as Gold Commanders with this background can get dangerously stuck in the detail to the detriment of the big picture issues
2	Although a Gold Commander could operate at bronze level without previous experience at that level, it is an advantage when considering the resource implications of a longer term event and the capability of any deployments made.
3	Bronze is hands on not planning like silver/gold
4	Application of skill set and knowledge required are significantly different
5	
6	As above
7	I believe it provides useful background information and understanding based on experience.
8	Of benefit, but limited
9	FRS is a tactical/operational service. Part of FRS job it gold is to advise on that capability.
10	As above
11	I need to understand what barriers are being experienced at Bronze
12	
13	No but its helpful if you do and you will probably be a better more informed gold commander as a result which ever discipline you ar in.
14	Sorry to cop out - but this is a difficult area to respond, but generally a working knowledge of operations would be needed.
15	Not if tactical information advise is available and also depends on the nature of the incident
16	I would say that operational experience is a benefit rather than a must.
	Q11B
	The Gold Commander will be involved with decision making at the Operational (BRONZE) level

1	this should not happen and would be highly inappropriate, leading to difficulties and confusion as the chain of command would be broken
2	The command structure should give the gold commander confidence and the ability to trust bronze commanders.
3	strategy affects silvers plan but it is not fair to say bronze involvement, only changes to silvers Tac planning do this
4	
5	
6	Not on normal operations but it may be necessary to change tactics based on decisions are taken in gold
7	See point one
8	Best to have clear separation
9	
10	
11	Gold will only give guidance through a communication channel but should be prepared to discuss a strategy for the Bronze to deliver against
12	
13	You don't keep a dog and bark yourself.
14	This would be highly unusual.
15	The Gold commander will set the strategy the bronze commander will implement(sic) that strategy,
16	
	Q12B
	The Gold Commander must have Tactical (SILVER) Command experience
1	same as 4 really - important to have close links and constructive dialogue with silver but really important to remember respective roles and responsibilities and not interfere (sic). Also, in the highest pace emergency environments, there is a real tendency for officers to revert to their comfort zones - often for Gold Commanders this can end up with them trying to do silver's job for them which can become a real problem.
2	Although a Gold Commander could operate at silver level without previous experience at that level, it is an advantage when considering the resource implications of a longer term event and the capability of any deployments made, by being able to draw on experiences at silver.
3	experience for essential understanding command only gives better experience
4	It is not essential (must) but is desirable.
5	

6	As previous
7	
8	Some benefit, but not an absolute!
9	You won't be at Gold II the time, there is an issue of resilience in the FRS command team, these roles need to be interchangeable.
10	Workforce are involved in risk critical scenarios. They deserve Gold Commanders who understand and have experience of that.
11	As discussed above the role of Gold can have no bearing of how the incident is being fought but must be assured that it is being dealt with. No point saying to Silver get on a put the fire out and then coming out of the ICU 3 hours later to see the building burnt to the ground and the Silver saying I have done what you asked boss
12	
13	See 4 above. You could bring that knowledge to the table with you as an advisor on service specific issues.
14	A working knowledge of this level would be needed. Again a difficult question to respond with great confidence.
15	whilst at times useful, with tactical advisors available not always needed
16	As with Bronze Command comments
	Q13B
	The Gold Commander should maintain competence as an Operational (BRONZE) Commander
1	
2	
3	not necessary and will not be competent
4	Disagree for the purposes of being a Gold Commander but one of the advantages of a Gold Commander that has also been Silver and Bronze is the ability to act down when required, therefore wise to maintain but not essential.
5	
6	In fire a gold may well have to run a large bronze area
7	
8	Not sure why you would require this
9	
10	They must maintain an experienced understanding of the context of Bronze operations.
11	
12	
13	Depends on the role the organisational needs and the cost effectiveness of such a decision.
14	do not think this would be needed

15	
16	
	Q14B
	The Gold Commander should maintain competence as a Tactical (SILVER) Commander
1	as above
2	The gold commander may need to operate at silver level at incidents (in some FRSs) where simultaneous response is required (silver already deployed) and until relieved
3	not essential but desirable benefits
4	Desirable but not essential.
5	
6	as above
7	In the main the number of Gold Command incidents are low and maintaining(sic) the Incident Command skills through practising, mentoring or monitoring at a silver command level is useful.
8	Again some benefit in doing this and keeps the Gold commander in contact with the wider role and pressures at different roles
9	See response to 6.
10	Organisations are shrinking to a point where interoperability between roles should be maintained.
11	It is helpful to attend and get involved in observation at lower level incidents but not specific to maintain competence
12	
13	AS above
14	Depends on the Service expectations.
15	
16	
	Q15B
	Tactical (SILVER) command experience is not necessary for effective decision making at GOLD level

1	I was Brigade Commander during the 2007 Floods in Hereford and Worcester where the Service rescued over 1200 and I also oversaw the National Flood Coordination Centre. Feedback on both the Service's and my own performance has been consistently good, I felt in no way hampered by not having bronze or silver command experience and my colleagues also felt the command team worked extremely effectively under the most challenging major incident this Service has responded to in its history. Is this not evidence enough ?
2	Although a Gold Commander could operate at silver level without previous experience at that level, it is an advantage when considering the resource implications of a longer term event and the capability of any deployments made, by being able to draw on experiences at silver.
3	not experience but needs essential understanding
4	The question is so open to interpretation that it is difficult to objectively answer. It depends on the context, the incident, the available technical advice and more.
5	
6	
7	
8	As above 6 & 8
9	See 3, 4, 6 & 7.
10	
11	As previously discussed
12	
13	You can bring that knowledge to the table in different ways. However if you have been a tactical silver you wil (sic) in all probability be a better Gold Commander as a result.
14	Some would be needed.
15	
16	I believe Silver experience is a benefit but not a must.
	Q16B
1	Yes, you should understand the tactical (sic) plan but don't ever confuse understanding a plan with the need to have the full detailed technical knowledge and skills to command at bronze or silver.
2	The tactical plan should be determined at the incident, based on risks, and remain dynamic. This should be monitored by silver (at most)
3	otherwise will not understand the FS objectives/time scales
4	Not required and perhaps even unhelpful to the Gold Commander
5	

6	
7	
8	understanding of the objectives from the tactical plan
9	That is to understand and provide advice to Gold.
10	
11	Depends of the incident
12	
13	Gold is the what and when Silver is the when and with what with a small dose of how Bronze is the how with what I have got resource wise or I have asked for.
14	Not necessary as this would not feature as part of the Gold Commanders decision making
15	
16	
	Q17B
	Most of the skills needed for effective Gold Command are acquired in a non-operational environment
1	
2	Although focused on strategy (sic) and finance etc. partners do look to the gold commander to advise on capability of resources
3	partly but both operational and non operational are essential
4	The one ability that I've witnessed as being difficult to extract from those that have never been in an emergency operational environment is the making of a decision without full information (as unavailable) and without too much prevarication.
5	
6	
7	
8	Possible to supply by use of a support officer
9	Command, FRS capability, ability to intervene when plan not working.
10	Critical skills to a competent level cannot be acquired through simulation alone.
11	
12	
13	Not skills but knowledge of what your teams and crews will be doing on the ground

	and how they may be working with others.
14	Not enough major incidents to go around!
15	
16	
	Q18B
	The Gold Commander can operate effectively without a Gold Support Officer (TACTICAL advisor)
1	
2	There is simply too much to do and support is required (sic), particularly around meetings and liaison with partners.
3	at times although working alone is pressured with spans of control. more than much less affective
4	If the Gold Commander is also Silver/Bronze experienced then not essential but if not then a tactical/technical advisor would be essential.
5	
6	
7	
8	I feel there is a real need for current operational knowledge and support in the Gold role
9	Can but less desirable
10	Normally does
11	Information is essential for decision making and the speed in which a SXG moves does not enable the Gold to do the necessary information gathering
12	
13	Depends on the knowledge and skills of the Gold and the resources available. Ideally I would suggest a Gold Commander would always benefit from a tactical advisor.
14	This would be difficult
15	
16	In my experience a tactical advisor is a must in a multi-agency Gold forum.
	Q19B

	The Gold Commander should always have a support officer to provide tactical advice
1	
2	
3	totally dependant on knowledge
4	See comments for 12 above
5	
6	
7	
8	As above
9	In that case just put the tactical advsor(sic) in there, Chair of gold can use that just as well as the FRS gold.
10	Gold (SCG's) are already crowded and confused. Additional officers required solely to cover skills gaps are not advised
11	
12	
13	If ossible(sic)and resources allow.
14	
15	
16	
	Q20B
	The Gold Commander must always sign off and approve the tactical plan
1	why ? Support yes. Scrutinise / discuss / challenge yes, approve/sign off does not set the right tone in that environment to me. Often not practicable either in widescale emergency situations.
2	This should be signed off by silver
3	only needs to provide support and strategic influence to the plan
4	Useful to get the Gold Commanders comments if they have the tactical/technical awareness but only the OiC at the incident should have the final say. For political reasons it may be useful to get Gold Command to agree plan but not strictly necessary.
5	
6	
7	
8	As 10, sign off the objectives of the plan
9	
10	

11	May not be a single agency decision nor that Gold commanders agency that is delivering the tactical plan
12	
13	Gold Commander should agree and sign off the SCG plan.
14	
15	
16	
	Q21B
	The Gold Commander will be involved with decision making at the Tactical (SILVER) level
1	Depends on what 'involved' means - should always have a good awareness of what's happening at silver and close communication / interaction. But should not end up getting distracted by silver. the whole point of the bronze/silver/gold structure is to establish clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Involved can very easily become the 'interfere' to the detriment of the resolution of the incident.
2	
3	At times to ensure objectives of Gold and Silver
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	If they have an operational background they will
9	
10	Contribute to rather than be involved with.
11	
12	
13	May advise and have a view on occasions or may be asked for advice(sic) or a view. Final decision rests with Silver.
14	Do not suggest that this will not always happen, there could be occasions where they would need to over-ride or challenge a silver decision - if there were broader implications.
15	
16	Can be on some occasions but not always.
	Q22B

	The Gold Commander will often be required to challenge decisions made at the Tactical (SILVER) level
1	Not if you have an effective silver commander, day to day organisational business should ensure this does not arise
2	No personal experience of this
3	not often but on occasions
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	Not required, but they may / will do
9	When silver plan does not meet requirements of gold group. Gold should provide scrutiny to silver, see Buncefield- Wilsher & Yates
10	
11	
12	
13	Nort(sic)often but on occasions. During 2007 floods in Gloucestershire Gold stepped in to alter resource allocation to a silver plan due to a change in Golds priorities across the County.
14	not often
15	
16	
	Q23B
	The Tactical (SILVER) Commander should determine the detail of amendments to the tactical plan, without direction from GOLD
1	remember pace and risk, can't check everything but should keep in close touch of course. this does depend on the circumstance and the proposed plan. It's not Gold's job to do tactical plan's, it's Gold's job to set strategic objectives and direction
2	Need to trust the abilities of the silver commander and the command system
3	yes its his/her plan although taking into account the gold objectives
4	In the best scenario the Gold and Silver work together but the Silver should have the ultimate say at it is he/she that has ight(sic) and communications with Bronze that have to implement.
5	
6	

7	
8	They should have the greater knowledge of assets, objectives and resources available
9	Without direction not without sign off.
10	
11	This depends upon the brief given by the Gold and the levels of trust and understanding of that brief
12	
13	That's silvers role, to turn the what and when from Gold into the outcome required.
14	
15	
16	
	Q24B
	During a major incident, decisions are ALWAYS delegated down to the most appropriate level (subsidiarity principle)
1	
2	
3	none
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	isn't there something about perspective here?
9	Nonsense
10	
11	Always in my experience as you haven't clarified what decision. For example I may say I want you to get someone on the roof with a branch i wouldn't make decisions about how they got up there or with what equipment or resources
12	
13	Should be, but people sometimes operate outside their role, or in the interests of expediency its just sometimes quicker to go direct. Gold commanders sometimes find it hard to take their hands off, silver and bronze areas.
14	This will not always happen as there is sometimes fuzziness about where a responsibility might rest (press and media/communications with external contacts is such an example)
15	
16	

	Q25B
	The skills required of the Gold Commander are significantly different from the requirement at Tactical (SILVER) level
1	
2	
3	more strategic and wider multi-agency
4	See comments for Q.1
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	Political Acuity, Relationship building, and influencing skills particularly important for Gold. Silver still very much a command role.
14	
15	
16	
	Q26B
	Strategic leaders without operational experience will have developed most of the skills required for effective Gold Command
1	Not necessarily, some seem to fit more naturally into the Gold Command environment than others so it is not that simple.
2	Fire is a specialist sector
3	on balance most but not enough
4	The ability to work in an immediate pressurised environment where decision made can, within minutes, turn into success or failure only occurs through effective training and experience which isn't normally part of a strategic leaders experience. There will also need to be a reasonable organisational knowledge and contextual understanding to operate effectively.
5	
6	
7	

8	Because Gold should be about strategy
9	How can they develop Command, capability and ability to intervene to correct a course of action when silver fails.
10	Experience
11	
12	
13	A the skills required are transferable from the boardroom to the Gold Command table, in most instances. Key difference is that in uniformed services the organisation recognises the hierarchy and will respond to commands where as this is not as prevalent in my experience in non uniformed services and industry.
14	Many qualities and attributes would be transferable from the day job - strategic thinking, critical analysis, long term planning, relations with other strategic leaders, etc.
15	
16	
	Q27B
	Strategic leaders without operational experience should be given the opportunity to develop as Gold Commanders
1	
2	
3	can be done with good support
4	The lack of operational experience will be a disadvantage but should not prevent successful development.
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	Where is the business case that these individuals are better than Ops leaders. Justify the time and expense it takes to develop ops skills in these staff.
10	We have a thousands of operationally experienced staff. If they are not producing strategic leaders then this must be addressed. We can't afford Months out for strategic leaders to learn the fire trade.
11	Subject to clear understanding of why and what circumstances would that skill be applied
12	

13	It would be a fairly lonely Gold otherwise, if the utilities, the EA, EMS, County and District Council Colleagues did not turn up.
14	Dependant on them demonstrating specific qualities and willingness to develop into the role.
15	
16	
	Q28B
	Gold Commanders without operational experience will be less inclined to get unnecessarily involved in detail at the Tactical (SILVER) level
1	
2	
3	depends solely on the individual
4	This would be the one advantage.
5	
6	
7	
8	I hope so!
9	
10	Even if the tactical level needs adjusting as this won't be recognised.
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
	Q29B
	Cultural barriers make it difficult for strategic leaders without operational experience to become Gold commanders
1	Does this mean prejudice (sic)? If so yes.
2	
3	Individuals use the excuse not cultural barriers
4	Historically yes but that glass ceiling has now been broken so not as much as in previous decades.

5	
6	
7	
8	
9	Its not cultural, it is service need driven.
10	
11	
12	
13	The environment of the organisation and LRF operating in normal state should reduce any cultural barriers to a low level. If not I would argue the organisation is headed in the wrong direction in any event.
14	
15	
16	
	Q30
	Please describe an occasion when a Gold Commander made a decision which was based solely on their own operational experience, and wasn't dependant on advice offered by Tactical level advisors. If you are unable to think of an example, I would be grateful for any other observations or comments you wish to make.
1	Happy to talk through more of my experiences if that would be of interest.
2	
3	My comments in this survey have been solely based on a multi-agency Gold event not just a fire gold
4	The vast majority of the Gold Commander's decisions on the Buncefield were made or influenced due to the Commanders previous experience at all levels.
5	At times, in small FRS, in spate conditions, it will be necessary for a Gold Commander at act at Silver/Bronze level, as happened during the flooding season.
6	
7	My own view is that operational experience informs your decision making even at a strategic level. In terms of practical examples most would come from scenario based training and assessments for appointments with the Leeds City Centre Chemical Incident of the ICGCC at the FSC a classic example. It is also interesting that on the last flood Rescue seminar in Charlotte Carolina delegates on the strategic element of the course were asked to experience operational and tactical elements to improve their understanding of the complexity and operational difficulties faced by operational crews and tactical commanders.

8	I can think of a number of times I have done or seen this, but I am not convinced it could not have been supplied by the advisor, or that it brought the incident to a conclusion any earlier!
9	WY, flooding incidents, knowledge of capability and what is not realistic. This was in the days before gold support was fully developed in WY.
10	Unique perspective of Worcestershire floods 2007.
11	At a chemical spillage the technical guidance offered was to use Gas Tight Suits and deploy the services bulk foam resources. I was concerned that we did not have the resources, that the H&S of our staff was paramount and also the we may be unable to deploy the bulk foam so i came up with an alternative proposal which satisfied (sic) the on scene managers but went outside service procedures including using an appliance in a way not used before.
12	Many of the skills needed for Gold Command can be gained without operational experience, A deep understanding of what it means to Command an emergency Service cannot. It is simply not the same working in non emergency orientated sectors. My experience at LRF Gold training events has demonstrated this to me on numerous occasions. There is a significant difference between senior management operating in a command mode, when one compares senior managers in the services to health or local government etc.
13	A Gold Commander asked that another senior commander with bronze experience would go and take charge of a particular (sic) field of opeartaions (sic) in a multi faceted incident, due to the strategic and political importance of this one site. If the Gold Commander had not had ops experience or had not worked with the other senior officer on the incident ground and in training they would no thave(sic) been able to come to this decision. Success factors determined it was the right decision to be made in the aftermat (sic) of the incident, through scrutiny and through the debriefs.
14	Declaration of a major incident would be one such example. A bronze commander had previously declared (this was an exercise not incident) and a judgement based on experience suggested that this was not an appropriate decision. The experience of the GC was that this would implicate far too many resources which were not proportionate to the precise issue at hand - we achieved the same outcome (movement of large numbers away from the incident) in a different way without resorting to the mass resources that otherwise would have been deployed.

Appendix D: Participant Survey

The survey overleaf was designed and administered via Survey Monkey
www.surveymonkey.com

1. Gold Command Questionnaire

I am currently undertaking research for an MA in Integrated Emergency Management, and would be grateful if you would complete this questionnaire, which should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete.

I am seeking to establish the perceptions of the Fire Gold Commander role, and whether the role is clearly defined. I am looking at whether it is necessary to have technical knowledge and understanding, and to have experienced operational and tactical levels of command, in order to be an effective Gold Commander.

I am focusing only on senior officers of the Fire and Rescue Service, therefore the research opportunities are limited. Please be assured that your answers will not be attributed to you personally, but will form the basis of a trend analysis, and your responses will be treated in strictest confidence.

Thank you Kind

regards Gary

Kavanagh

2. About You

Please answer the following questions relating to your role and experience (tick one box only).

1. Which organisation do you work for?

Fire & Rescue

*

2. What is your job title and role?

3. How long have you worked for your organisation?

0-5 years

5-15 years

15-20 years

20 +years

4. Do you have tactical command experience?

None

Less than 5 years

5- 15 years

15 +years

5. Do you currently provide cover as a Gold Commander?

Yes

1. Do you feel adequately prepared for Gold Command?

Yes

(if you answered no, please state why)

2. In your opinion, which one of the following is the most effective method of preparing for Gold Command?

Training Course

Mentoring at an incident

Observation

Case Studies

(additional comments)

4. The Role of the Gold Commander

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. Please tick one box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The decision making skills required at Gold are significantly different to the requirement at Operational (BRONZE) level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(please explain your reasoning)

2. Please tick one box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The decision making skills required at Gold are significantly different to the requirement at Tactical (SILVER) level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(please explain your reasoning)

3. Please tick one box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Gold Commander requires a high degree of technical knowledge and understanding , to be effective in their decision making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(please explain your reasoning)

4. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander must have Operational (BRONZE) command experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(please explain your reasoning)

5. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander will be involved with decision making at the Operational (BRONZE) level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(additional comments)	<hr/>				

6. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander must have Tactical (SILVER) Command experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(please explain your reasoning)	<hr/>				

7. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander should maintain competence as an Operational (BRONZE) Commander	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(additional comments)	<hr/>				

8. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander should maintain competence as a Tactical (SILVER) Commander	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(additional comments)	<hr/>				

9. Please tick one box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Tactical (SILVER) command experience is not necessary for effective decision making at GOLD level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(please explain your reasoning)	<hr/>				

10. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander must always have a comprehensive understanding of the tactical plan	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

(please explain your reasoning)

11. Please tick one box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Most of the skills needed for effective Gold Command are acquired in a non-operational environment	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

(describe any skills that you believe cannot be acquired in a non-ops environment)

12. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander can operate effectively without a Gold Support Officer (TACTICAL advisor)	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

(please explain your reasoning)

13. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander should always have a support officer to provide tactical advice	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

(additional comments)

14. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander must always sign off and approve the tactical plan	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

(please explain your reasoning)

15. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander will be involved with decision making at the Tactical (SILVER) level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(additional comments)	<hr/>				

16. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Gold Commander will often be required to challenge decisions made at the Tactical (SILVER) level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(can you describe an example of when this happened?)	<hr/>				

17. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Tactical (SILVER) Commander should determine the detail of amendments to the tactical plan, without direction from GOLD	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(why do you believe that?)	<hr/>				

18. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
During a major incident, decisions are ALWAYS delegated down to the most appropriate level (subsidiarity principle)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(please provide an example of where, in your experience, this hasn't happened)	<hr/>				

19. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The skills required of the Gold Commander are significantly different from the requirement at Tactical (SILVER) level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(additional comments)	<hr/> <hr/>				

20. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Strategic leaders without operational experience will have developed most of the skills required for effective Gold Command	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(why do you believe this?)	<hr/> <hr/>				

21. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Strategic leaders without operational experience should be given the opportunity to develop as Gold Commanders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(additional comments)	<hr/> <hr/>				

22. Please tick one box

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Gold Commanders without operational experience will be less inclined to get unnecessarily involved in detail at the Tactical (SILVER) level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(additional comments)	<hr/> <hr/>				

Thankyou for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

I would be grateful if you would answer one final question which may relate to either yourself, or someone you have obseNed, as a Gold Commander.

I am interested in examples of where the Gold Commander has had to draw upon their own personal operational experience when making a decision, rather than rely upon their Gold Support Team (tactical advisors).

1. Please describe an occasion when a Gold Commander made a decision which was based solely on their own operational experience, and wasn't dependant on advice offered by Tactical level advisors.

If you are unable to think of an example, I would be grateful for any other observations or comments you wish to make.

23. Please tick one box

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Cultural barriers make it
difficult for strategic leaders
without operational
experience to become
Gold commanders

(additional comments)

Appendix E: Interviewee Matrix

Interviewee	Role	No: Years in Role	No: of times attended live SCG	Additional Comments
A	Chief Fire Officer	10>	1	Attended SCG (JOCC) during industrial action
B	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	<5	1	Referenced Fire Gold role (at incident scene?)
C	Chief Fire Officer	5>	1	Gold experience at lower Principal Officer level
D	Chief Fire Officer	5>	2	Gold experience at lower Principal Officer level
E	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	<5	1	Attended SCG as Fire Gold Commander
F	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	<5	0	Gold level exercise experience only