THE USE OF BEHAVIOURAL EXPERTS IN CRISIS NEGOTIATION

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Professional crisis negotiation is part of the police response to critical incidents since the seventies. Several large-scale, politically motivated hostage situations and hijackings urged the need for professionally trained communicators, known as 'hostage negotiators' (Veness, this volume). Since then, the shift from a purely tactical police intervention to a communication-based approach has proved successful in a broad range of life-threatening crisis situations. US data show that the 'contain and negotiate' method results in approximately 1 % chance of injury or death, while assaulting a hostage taker results in more than 70 % chance of injury or death (Greenstone, 1995). Comparable figures for European countries are not available, but there is little doubt that the deployment of hostage negotiators in Europe is successful as well.

Crucial to the effective handling of hostage negotiation situations is insight into human behaviour and its determinants. Often, behavioural experts assist the police in the area of crisis intervention. Prior to the First European Conference on Hostage Negotiations, 19 behavioural experts with experience in police work met in a symposium chaired by Evert van de Vliert from the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. The goals of the meeting were:
- to gain insight into the roles of behavioural experts in hostage-taking incidents;
- to identify complementary and joint research interests;
- to lay foundations for future co-ordination or co-operation.

State of affairs

Most countries employ behavioural experts – usually psychologists – in the following areas:

(1) *Selection and training.* Psychologists often assist in the selection process of hostage negotiators. They also provide training in negotiation skills and help to improve psychological sensitivity to the interactive dynamics of crisis negotiations.

(2) *Operational support*, including psychological profiling of the hostage-taker(s), advice about negotiation strategies, and monitoring group processes in the negotiation cell.

(3) *Post negotiation assistance*, for example in debriefing negotiators and victims. The participants indicated they have very little contacts with behavioural experts in both their own as well as other countries. Therefore, a first avenue for co-operation that was identified refers to the exchange of working methods. Besides such an exchange of 'best practice', participants expressed the need for further developing and elaborating on the behavioural science component in crisis negotiation. In this respect negotiation research and theory may prove beneficial.

Crisis negotiation research

Specific research concerning hostage negotiations is non-existent in Europe. Three first priority avenues fur further research were identified:

1. Simple statistics
A first attempt to gain insight into simple incident statistics (Giebels, this volume) showed that in many countries these data are not available or unreliable. This is unfortunate because a comparison of findings over years may unfold important trends that may help to effectively respond to future developments. Participants indicated that specific knowledge may prove beneficial with respect to two areas in particular. First, research may show how to anticipate the increasing number of crisis incidents in which individuals with different cultural backgrounds are involved. In this respect, an international database, which includes incident information from many culturally different countries, may be helpful. Second, research findings may suggest how to negotiate across individual-group boundaries. Usually, negotiators are taught how to respond to individuals with different psychological profiles. Increased insight is needed when dealing with groups of perpetrators as well as perpetrators whose framework is based on a group identity (cults etc.).

2. Different perspectives
Research and training usually departs from the perspective of the police negotiator. That is, within the triangle perpetrator-negotiator-victim the focus is primarily on the negotiator-perpetrator relationship and looks at it from the police negotiator's perspective. As a consequence, there is relatively little insight into underlying cognition and motivations of the perpetrator, especially when this is difficult to infer from the interaction. Inferences about a perpetrator's motivations and thoughts are usually more difficult to estimate when dealing with a 'rational' negotiator as opposed to incidents with an emotionally or psychologically disturbed individual. Police negotiators often deal with relatively rational negotiators, for example in kidnap and extortion cases. A second conclusion is that

negotiator training and practice may benefit from increased insight into negotiator – victim and perpetrator – victim relationships.
Both issues raised here may be addressed by systematically linking recorded hostage negotiations (transcripts or audio/video-tapes) of actual incidents to post-incident interviews with the parties involved. The interviews may particularly tap into the underlying motivations, cognition and emotions associated with critical incidents during interaction.

3. Review of existing models
Furthermore, numerous negotiation and communication models exist that can be applied to the specific context of hostage-taking incidents. For example, Rogan's model of Relational Development in Hostage Negotiation was discussed (Rogan, this volume). It would be useful to review these models and to test their relevance for hostage negotiations. This may also provide a coherent structure for understanding and interpreting the ground rules – 'do's and don'ts' – currently employed in crisis negotiation. Eventually, a tailor-made model for crisis negotiation may be tested by relating recorded negotiations to structured in-depth interviews with the key parties involved.

Conclusion

Behavioural experts play an important role in training and selection, they provide support in actual incidents, and they may also prove valuable in further developing the field of crisis intervention by using research related insights. From a review of existing literature (which is mainly of Northern American origin) several relevant issues for research can be identified which are currently not being dealt with.

Reference

Greenstone, J.L. (1995). Tactics and negotiating techniques (TNT): The way of the past and the way of the future. In: M.I. Kurke & E.M. Scrivner (eds.), Police Psychology into the 21st century. Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum