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A Good Practice – Situational Training in Civilian National Security Education

The article presents the meaning, sources and development of situational training. It discusses its place and role in civilian national security education and also describes its personal and material conditions, the tools and equipment used. It presents the related challenges and limitations and highlights the connections between experiential learning and situational training. The article points out the importance of knowledge transfer within a group as well as the importance of self-expression. It underlines the significant role of the fact-based planning and preparedness for unforeseen events and outlines a possible way of development of situational training in the form of reactive shooting.

Keywords: *situational awareness, three-dimensional knowledge, enduring skills, experiential learning, communication skills, stress tolerance, pain tolerance, reactive shooting, prevention and management of emergencies during operational collecting*

1. Introduction

Situational training has been a stable place in the training of law enforcement and national defence organisations – be it training at any level. This is also the case in civilian national security education. In this article, we summarise our practice, what do we mean by situational training in civilian national security education. We also highlight how to use and how to develop further this proven method. In this context, we interpret the meaning of situational training and present the two sources from which the situational training practice of civilian national security education is based. We also give the floor to discuss its place and role in the education summarising the experience gained from situational training. Nevertheless, we briefly present – as our own added value – a possible way to develop further the situational training.

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2. The meaning of situational training

By situational training we always mean group interaction, during which our students and some of our selected students take part in interactions with other students in the same group, or with specially requested spotters, also known as role players, and pre-recorded and projected scenes. During situational training, the exercise leader gives brief, usually deliberately contradictory, instructions to volunteer role-players who are unfamiliar with the instructions given to the other party. The aim is to build tension quickly during the scenes, creating a situation where students can show off and thereby develop their communication or other skills.

At this point we must say that the instructions are intentionally short and concise. It is a common misconception that students wait for detailed instructions or complain about the lack of it. We also realise that it is not a matter of creating film scenes and scenarios, but of practicing situations which are as realistic as possible, where, like in real life, we have to build on personality, experience, existing professional knowledge and also on knowledge acquired during education, to meet an assumed or real expectation.

As referred above, situational exercises are always guided by an exercise leader. His/her task is to select and create situations; to give a description of the situation; to select the role players; to indicate clearly the beginning and the end of the scene; and, where it is appropriate, to give the description of and compliance with security regulations. He/she also decides to replay the scenes in the same or changing way, such as by changing roles. It is his/her responsibility to capture the scenes. The exercise leader also plays an important role in evaluating the situational practice. During the evaluation, we aim to have the lessons learned by the participants where possible. To this end, everyone present can share their feelings, perceptions and experiences about the scenes. You can outline the lessons to be learned. The sequence: always the “viewers” start, the ones who have not been actively involved in the scene. This is followed by the participants and only then does the practice leader make a statement. It is very important that evaluation and feedback to each other is always positive. We do not have to look for faults in ourselves and others, we have to program ourselves for success, just like in real life. Participants should identify possible or appropriate solutions for this.

According to our experience, evaluation is a key element of situational training. It is clear from the above that the honesty of the participants is essential for this. Obviously, this cannot be forced. However, we strive to facilitate this as much as possible through a kind of mutual voluntary commitment that the scenes that have been spoken and possibly recorded will only be used within the group. Volunteering is also important for the success of the training method. It is important that ideally volunteers take part in the scenes, as strengthening self-confidence plays a key role in the training.

3. Sources and forerunners

Two sources and one forerunner of situational training used in civilian national security education can be identified. One source is the training method used in adult education. This is mainly group work, group evaluation;² we receive and use self-reflection and self-message. The practice of capturing scenes for analysis also comes from this source. The main aim is to raise verbal and non-verbal communication to a higher level. During the joint evaluation of the scenes, which can be supported by the recording of images and sound, as well as the playback of the recorded visual sound material, the sound, speech tempo, body language, gestures, space management and posture as communication components are the key elements. We want to achieve a high level of purposeful use, and the exercises are aimed at raising these complex skills to a higher level. This type of training is used in civilian national security training in HUMINT-related courses.³

The other source comes from so-called “Force on Force” training,⁴ in which we mimic legitimate defence, police action, or melee with tools that imitate the use and application of various firearms, and then evaluate the standard of execution. Among the simulation tools, we should mention the products of FX Simunition,⁵ which offers a range of patented simulation firearms in the most accurate way currently known, and mimics the effect of real live projectiles with sufficient efficiency within a few meters, but without permanent damage.

It is no accident that the company’s products have been patented: this effective system of training tools is only sold to law enforcement and defence organisations. We use these tools regularly in our training. It should be mentioned that the so-called paintball and airsoft⁶ tools are also widely used in tactical situational exercises. They have the advantage of being available on the civilian market without restriction, so that they can also be used for private security training outside the law enforcement agency. However, their viability lags far behind that of patented products, and so does their effectiveness in situational exercises. It is important to underline that the use of all the devices outlined above is only possible with the use of protective equipment.

In tactical situational exercises, our goal is for participants to experience what it is like to be threatened with violence and, if they have to respond to it in a legitimate way, also to use force. An important circumstance is that this experience is, fortunately, completely new to the vast majority of participants. It is also the goal of tactical training to get participants to feel the pain and learn to control it. This plays a key role in ensuring that, in a real fight, their minor damage during a real action does not result in incapacitation that would give the opponent an advantage and put the law enforcement or combat defence operator performing the action at an unprotected

² See also Stephen Petrina: *Advanced Teaching Methods for the Technology Classroom*. Hershey, IGI Global, 2006.

³ See e.g. courses ZNEHKNB1060 and HKNB23.

⁴ See Gabriel Suarez: *Force-on-Force Gunfight Training. The Interactive, Reality-Based Solution*. Boulder, Paladin Press, 2005.

⁵ See <https://simunition.com>

⁶ Both are widely used for recreational purposes and the devices (markers) can be considered toys, although often very realistic toys.

disadvantage. Pain is an ancient and powerful stimulus: with the said tools and the said procedure, it is very effective to engrave different, mainly tactical and action-tactical procedures, i.e. to record them in the memory of the participants. Experience shows that the skills engraved in this way are extremely durable.

In addition to the above, the method is highly suited to experiencing the stress associated with legitimate protection and the use of state-sanctioned legitimate violence. The trainees experience and learn about the changes in their own organisation in this regard. Here, primarily for the narrowing and peculiar nature of perception and the disappearance of rational judgment. As a next step, we also try to build the ability to tolerate and control stress and to act during stress by repeating the exercises.

For the first time in Hungary, József Végh and István Farkas integrated and developed the methods presented above. Over the years, they have created more than just a room, the so-called tactical house to practise and observe various situations at the FBI-run International Law Enforcement Academy in Budapest, Hungary and the International Education Center that hosts it; not only were a larger number of cameras and image capture systems acquired and used, but the method was supplemented as well. This was done primarily by measuring the physiological characteristics of stress and taking these results into account in the evaluation. An additional merit of these two professionals is that their work was also published,⁷ believing that the method is justified and necessary. They argued that if our goal is for law enforcement and defence operators to be able to act effectively in real, sharp situations, and not to develop the necessary skills first at the cost of personal loss or the escape of criminals, it is not enough to rely solely on legislation and textbooks-focussed theoretical education, but long-term, skill-level, activatable patterns of behaviour – using their terminology, three-dimensional knowledge – are needed. Of course, we also strive for this in civilian national security education.

In the civilian national security education, we perform complex situational exercises on the example of the International Training Center, but based on our own professional experience, in the framework of courses presenting the prevention and management emergencies during operational collection.⁸

4. The place and role of situational trainings in civilian national security education

The content of this section can be evaluated correctly if we take into account the participants of the civilian national security education, as well as the activities of the organisations that send them, and their legal background. In summary, it can be said that the Hungarian system of national security institutions is basically based on the British model, in which the national security services do not have investigative

⁷ See István Farkas – József Végh: A lélektaktikai képzés elvei, módszerei és gyakorlati tapasztalatai [Principles, Methods and Experiences of the So-Called Soul-Tactical Training]. *Magyar Rendészet*, 3, no. 3 (2003). 53–62.

⁸ See classes NPNBM18 and NPNBB01.

authority.⁹ At the same time, training should take into account the fact that there may be and are situations in which they are forced to take physical risks in addition to interactions with other people. Members of the services also took their oath in respect of this possibility.

In addition, the training is open to staff from all organisations entitled to secret reconnaissance, subject to other appropriate conditions. So there are those who have an obligation to use legitimate force. Thus, the use of situational trainings is justified and necessary, but it is also justified and natural that they do not occupy a central place in the curriculum.

It is also necessary to note that due to the small number of applications derived above, we also need to be aware of the limitations of the methodology. We also make the participants aware that the small number of situational trainings does not replace the detailed and longer-term trainings carried out at the ordering bodies as required. So, we do not make anyone an invincible superhero, but at the same time we draw a lot of attention to the possible physical danger and the need to prevent and avoid them – whether the participant in the training sees himself as either an operational worker or, we hope, a leader. Situational training also raises an internal need for professional intelligence reconnaissance and preparation in the midst of threats.

From another point of view, university and faculty leadership have repeated the rightful expectation to strive for experiential education. Well, situational training meets these aspects to the fullest and greatest extent possible. We can say that in addition to all this, it gives competence to the students participating in this kind of training. The skills acquired there are deeply fixed, whatever the type of training. It is also important, that the ability to self-reflect and self-communicate improves during the assessment. Parallel to this, even the level of verbal reflection improves. In line with general experience, it can also be said that the skills acquired during this kind of training are deeply anchored.

5. Summary of our experience with situational training

Turning to the experience, we must first state that the material and personal conditions for the application of the methodology are also given. In other words, there are several types of tactical houses available in the special education building handed over in 2017, and also an indoor shooting range not far from the complex. FX Simunition tools and protective equipment are available, as well as an instructor who is trained in the application of the methods and has a Master's degree in pedagogy. What also refers to the experience, it can be said that students are very interested in participating in the exercises. If a difference can be made, it seems to add more value to participants in BSc level, and they prefer it very much indeed.

In some cases, the experience and intellectual control of the participants in the Master's degree seem to paradoxically prevent those from experiencing the scenes as real. Participants are sometimes concerned about being in school and participating

⁹ See Act CXXV of 1995 on National Security Services.

in a set scene rather than gathering quasi real-world experiences. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that they are more often and more adhering to the inherently correct thesis that national security activities are planned and that there should not be problems with proper planning and a high level of implementation. Of course, we also emphasise the importance of planning and prevention during our education, but we want to dispel the false illusion of “this cannot happen to us”. Also related to the nature of school training is the unpleasant circumstance that we have already alluded to, according to which role players are waiting for detailed instructions and are looking for the only correct solution. It is difficult to accept that this does not always exist.

The experiential nature of the trainings and the positive feelings related to it are constantly confirmed by our students. As role-players, we regularly ask students who take part in full-time law enforcement education,¹⁰ taking care of the security of the information, of course. The practice is a great experience for them too, and they say they benefit from it. It is also important to say that the cohesion of the group is strengthening and that knowledge transfer is well observed within the group.

It can be appreciated from experience that despite the repeated benefits of video and audio recordings, we are not used to them. The main reason for this is that we want to maintain the security of our students, who are employees of national security and law enforcement agencies. Another reason is that since the evaluation of the scenes takes place immediately after the exercise, it can be carried out at a high level due to the intensity of the fresh memories, even without the help of the recorded video material.

6. The reactive shooting

The so-called reactive shooting can be considered a further development of situational training as an innovative method. In doing so, the participant of the exercise will be screened on scenes with live actors who, when viewed, pose a threat that substantiates or does not substantiate the lawful use of weapons. The shots are fired with a live firearm. The results are evaluated either on the projected image itself, which is stopped by an automation, or in an improved version of the system, i.e. a computer using microphones to generate and display the hit points.

Last but not least the methodological development can be seen in the fact that we use a system developed by a Hungarian computer specialist.¹¹ We also take part in refining, recording and inventing the scenes. The advantage of this solution is that it is possible to simulate the real threat with a live firearm in a very economical way and the legal and professional response will be given or can be given to the action immediately. It should be noted that in the course of practice we do not seek to

¹⁰ Special thanks to our colleagues at the Institution for Law Enforcement Training and Education at the UPS Law Enforcement Faculty, especially to Pol. Cap. György Bánházi.

¹¹ Attila Belme, also an enthusiastic sport shooter and volunteer EMS first responder.

acquire a high level of use of weapons, but to practise a lawful reaction. It can also be said that our students especially appreciate these exercises.

7. Summary and outlook

Civilian national security education takes place in the context of an open university using the Bologna model, with all its advantages and contradictions. It follows that practical training cannot take up a much larger place in training than has been the case in the above-mentioned circumstances. However, due to the advantages presented above and the demonstrable competitive advantage over other training, its application should be maintained and developed.

Mention should also be made of the added value in the search for, design and application of scenes and in the application and development of reactive shooting tools. Together, this contributes to the quality of civilian national security education and our belief in a competitive advantage over other similar educations as well.

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