The Journal of Search and Rescue (JSAR) is an open access peer-reviewed electronic journal for the collation and distribution of original scholarly material on search and rescue (SAR).

It is being supported by the in-kind work and contributions of the Editorial Board. There is currently need for a dedicated journal serving those with a direct interest in all disciplines of search and rescue including: rope rescue, water (flat, swift and marine), ice rescue, wilderness search and rescue, structural collapse rescue, trench collapse rescue, cave rescue, dive rescue, motor vehicle extrication, canine search, technical animal rescue, air rescue and mines rescue. JSAR exists to fulfil that need. Article submissions from these and other SAR disciplines are welcome.

Launching this journal on the internet offers a relatively cost-effective means of sharing this invaluable content. It affords the prompt publication of articles and the dissemination of information to those with an interest in SAR.

JSAR will provide a forum for the publication of original research, reviews and commentaries which will consolidate and expand the theoretical and professional basis of the area. The Journal is interested in strategic, tactical, operational and technical matters.

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Editorial: Phases of Rescue Organisation

As a result of my research and day job, I speak to volunteers and professionals in the SAR and emergency sectors daily and hear frequent tales of practitioners commonly going the extra mile, performing heroic rescues, working with their communities to make them safer and working far beyond what they are paid (or volunteer) to do officially. Sadly, I also hear frequent reports of frustration, lack of focus, mismanagement and border-line illegal activity within teams across the world.

As such, I have been thinking recently about change throughout the lifetime of a team, and how many SAR teams, especially charity-sector teams, seem (to my eyes) follow a common pattern of phases through time. Having worked with and for a number of them over the last decade, and having written about many more in various outlets, I started to notice some patterns, and with them some common potential dangers facing teams.

The advantage of the editorial brief is that I can, to some extent, make an argument or observation without having to justify it to the level of a peer-reviewed piece, and so this editorial reflects some initial, un-validated thoughts that I hope may stimulate a debate or perhaps a fuller piece of work from someone in the future.

My thoughts are loosely based within classic organisational theory (Daft, 2010), although I don't claim to have any true expertise in that field, and suggests that there are a number of phases of development that are common to rescue organisations as they reach maturity. My proposed phases are described as follows:

Demand phase

This initial phase occurs when there is the demand or requirement for a rescue service, yet none exists. For example, prior to the 1960s there was no organised SAR set-up in Yosemite, but as the park became more and more popular with climbers, and as climbing itself became more advanced and adventurous, the need became apparent. In the UK in the 1970s, there was little organised International USAR team organisation and so volunteers started to create their own teams in response to the perceived gap.

This phase maybe typified by calls from regional media for "something to be done", or perhaps the gap of provision is matched by a gap in knowledge, with agencies, public and media all unaware of the issue. Recent developments with the London Search & Rescue team, or the initial establishment of MOAS in the Mediterranean (a few years ago) may fit this phase.
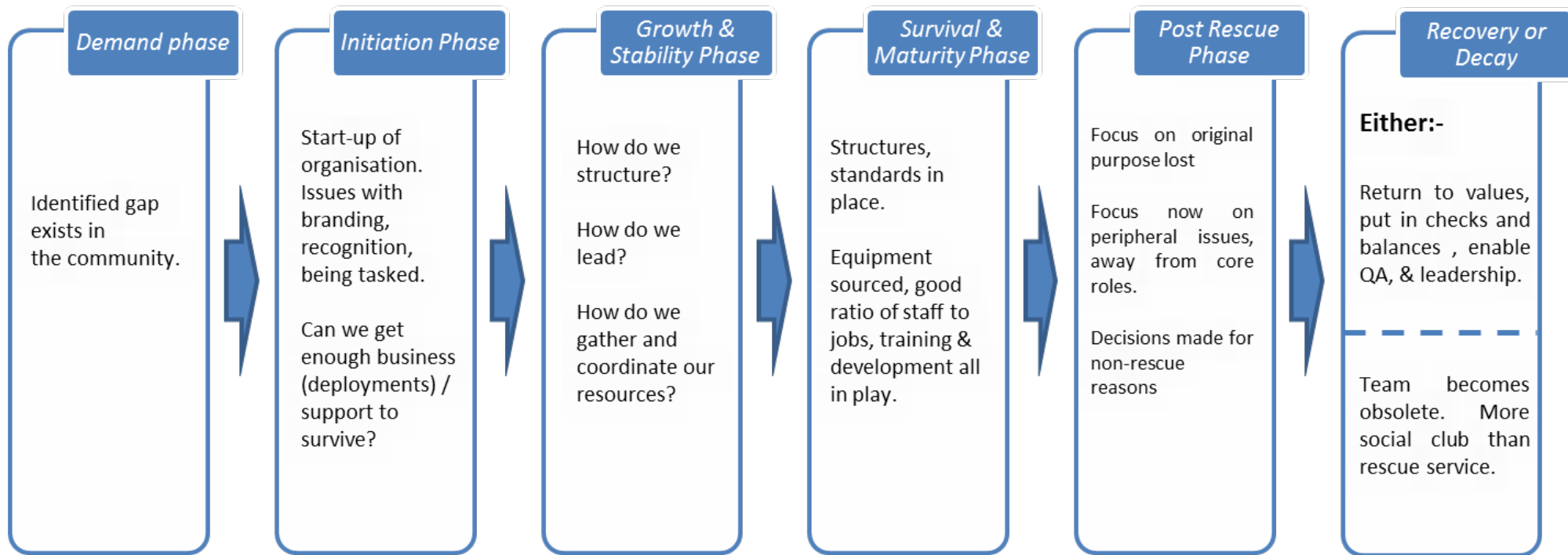
Demand phase	Initiation Phase	Growth & Stability Phase	Survival & Maturity Phase	Post Rescue Phase	Recovery or Decay
Identified gap exists in the community.	Start-up of organisation. Issues with branding, recognition, being tasked.

Can we get enough business (deployments) / support to survive? | How do we structure?

How do we lead?

How do we gather and coordinate our resources? | Structures, standards in place.

Equipment sourced, good ratio of staff to jobs, training & development all in play. | Focus on original purpose lost

Focus now on peripheral issues, away from core roles.

Decisions made for non-rescue reasons | **Either:-**

Return to values, put in checks and balances , enable QA, & leadership.

Team becomes obsolete. More social club than rescue service. |

Figure 1: A theoretical lifecycle of SAR teams.

Initiation phase

There may be legal requirements, such as vetting, that is required, or a period of probation whilst the local law enforcement or emergency services agency verifies the good intentions or proficiency of the new team.

Alternatively the environment may be entirely void of governing or competing bodies. There may be no requirement for a new "search and rescue" charity to register or conform to existing standards.

Growth & stability

This phase is often turbulent, typified by internecine struggles of or the control of the scope and direction of the team. The essential questions are asked and answered regarding the fundamentals of the team. Issues of structure, command and control, governance, training, recording, growth and future sustainability are addressed.

This phase sees the team begin to carry out operations, and gain a reputation. The initial enthusiasm of the members in addressing the need of the community results in good morale within the team, and a good initial working relationship with state services. There is likely to be some suspicion amongst some professional organisations, but at this stage the limited scope, teamed with that enthusiasm, means that the team is likely to have initial successes operationally.

Survival & maturity

The team has forged sustainable links with state bodies, national standards organisations and has an established PR presence, securing more stable fundraising and the ability to engender goodwill with positive news stories about its activities. The team grows and starts to expand its activities beyond its initial core function. This is often entirely reasonable, and seeks to support the core function. For example, the creation of an off-road vehicle capability to enable foot searchers to embed deeper or to extract causalities more easily.

The team may well become more involved in strategic thinking, internally and externally. For example it may have a voice on a local emergency planning or resilience forum, and be a part of a local authority's plans for major incidents. They may have established a relationship with the media and may be called upon to comment on cases and issues in the public domain, outside their direct jurisdiction.

Post rescue phase

This phase is typified by decisions being made for reasons other than purely to save life or further the core aims of the organisation. For example, money spent on training a member of staff to be a helicopter pilot, if there is little or no chance of helicopters becoming a part of that organisation. There are widespread occurrences of *folie de grandeur*, with funds being spent on vanity projects, vehicles or equipment for certain personnel that serves no practical use. An example may be creating a fleet of boats, trained to work in a coastal environment for a landlocked, inland agency. The process of training may be fun, and tangential links to rescue could probably be made, but realistically, the link between the two is tenuous – the true purpose of this exercise is to appropriate the glamour and kudos of other organisations.

At its worst, this stage sees the dismissal of members who disagree, or point out mistakes. There is often a strong, small core of self-interest, with culture of yes men, and any divergent opinions being put down, regardless of their validity.

There may be fraudulent manipulation of statistics to present certain members in a positive or negative light (for example team leaders with 100% recorded attendance or training records on paper, despite no real attendances). Hypocrisy and chaos is widespread, with members capriciously rewarded or punished for identical actions. Ultimately trust, integrity and the purpose of the team is eroded. Factions can develop within teams, resulting in communication within the team, between elements of the team and externally decline to the point of paralysis.

A disproportionate number of disciplinary actions against members may result from a leadership or factions within the team desperately trying to (re)gain control. These can be for trumped up, imaginary or wholly inappropriate reasons, and are often characterised by leadership paranoia - the objective is to remove members they perceive as rivals or as detracting from their status as a result of greater expertise or experience.

The decline could be for environmental changes of course, rather than team disintegration. In some cases, the teams could be argued to have done too good a job, and effectively removed the danger they were responding to – through structural changes, education campaigns or the introduction of technology.

This phase represents a danger that most teams face at some point. The majority of teams spend only a short time in this phase, before recovery. The *post-rescue organisation* should be something we all seek to avoid, being in essence a team that can only harm the sector, its members and the vulnerable we aim to serve.

Recovery or decay

Decay

The issues seen in the post rescue phase descend into farce, with the decisions and actions of the team having increasingly less connection to the initial purpose of that team. There are teams I know of that haven't been deployed for years, and seemingly have no intention or occasion to be, yet continue to fundraise and post on social media.

Recovery

Clearly, teams in the 'Post-Rescue' or 'Decay' phase are rare, and the vast majority either never reach this stage, or ever develop any of the bad practices associated with them. Even if they do, they typically identify issues early and start their recovery phase. The movement for recovery can be an internal or external force, and starts with a recognition of some of the post-rescue issues. There is likely to be a period of turmoil as the team re-focusses, and clearly those associated with bad behaviours in the post-rescue phase will not want to relinquish power. They will also have an entirely reasonable suspicion that they will be removed from positions of power once the recovery starts, making them less amenable to change. With this is mind, it would seem the more productive route to recovery would be a conciliatory approach, rather than a palace coup, with the emphasis being on recovery, rather than punishment of past transgressions.

Reading Jennifer Lois's 2001 paper on social structure and socialisation in a successful SAR team, you can see the way the team in question self-selected out the personalities that could be damaging to the team – any member who attempted to

claim credit for the team's work, through awards or media contact. Arrogance or egoism was actively discouraged with the group and humility and respect were encouraged. Displays of pride or hubris were considered detrimental to the team, as were what Cialdini (et al, 1976) calls BIRGing (basking in the reflected glory of the team) – this could manifest itself in the use social media to self-promote or exaggerate role, changes to uniform to lend false authority to the individual or group or excessive vehicle enhancement.

Any member who showed humility and admission of mistakes was given kudos within the team, and this contributed to a greater sense of team spirit and a healthier and more productive team environment.

In Conclusion

As someone who was once accused having an "Agenda of Subversion" (within a SAR context), it's fair to say I have had my fair share brushes with the politics of SAR. I have to admit that my penchant for subversion has probably been strong in this editorial, and as such, it is deliberately provocative. That said, it is *not without purpose*; my intention is to provoke organisations to consider where they sit on the axis of organisational lifecycle and what the implications of that are.

Do we need to remind ourselves of our core purpose, or nudge ourselves back to the original mission? Do we need to refresh or restructure our leadership teams, seek external governance or validation? Are we sure we are acting in a legal manner, and are we confident that "white lies", idiosyncrasies and bent rules that we justify under the banner of volunteers doing good, will be seen in the same light by the authorities? Finally, what is the cost of these potential transgressions with our relationships with other agencies – voluntary or professional?

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