

Improving call management – summary, assessment, response (SAR)

Based on an FBI model that has been piloted for police call handlers to improve call management, and the application of THRIVE (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement).

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Operational policing Organisation including workforce Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	South Wales Police
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Region	Wales
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is at a pilot stage.
Start date	March 2023
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	General public Victims Workforce
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Aim

The aims of introducing the SAR were to:

- uplift confidence of call handlers in assessing calls
- improve the quality of call risk assessment
- improve call handling performance
- cut down on waste in relation to regrading

Intended outcome

- improved call quality and THRIVE assessment
- reduction in regrading challenges
- reduction in call completion time

Description

The SAR was piloted in response to three separate but connected drivers:

- previous findings on the lack of utility and staff confidence in THRIVE as an assessment tool for capturing threat, risk, harm and vulnerability
- the opportunity to improve service to the public through enhanced call quality and performance via improved call control and recording
- the need to prepare contact staff for the introduction of a new welfare check policy that would require potentially more challenging contacts with partners.

There has been extensive training on the use of THRIVE, but issues with its use remained.

The approach to the SAR was shaped by the following:

Consideration of use of scripts

These were not adopted, due to concern that an overly formulaic approach could increase risk through reducing professional curiosity and empathy by over-reliance on a rigid process.

Slow time conversation management

The pilot was informed by the experience of the programme lead in child protection social work and negotiator approaches to conversation management.

Simplified structure

To seek a simpler approach to call structure and THRIVE application, the force negotiator suggested the adoption of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) SAR model (status, assessment, result). This was then adapted to situation, assessment and response, and then finally became summary, assessment and response.

The SAR pilot is the second phase of developing an improved call management approach. The first phase focused on taking control of a call with simple statements such as 'Can I stop you there, as I need to ask you specific questions to be able to help you.'

The first phase was successful in enabling staff to move away from a policy that maintained all callers on the line, regardless of urgency, if they came through on 999. This reduced call times on average by one minute thirty seconds, with a positive response in the confidence of call handlers.

The second phase focused on building on call control and the application of THRIVE by embedding the call assessment (relevant parts of THRIVE) and rationale ('I am grading this X because...') into the summary. Comments from experienced control room staff refer to this being similar to a previously used approach when the emphasis had been on putting the crucial information into a short summary at the top of the call information. This had been superseded more recently by training focused on obtaining a verbatim transcript from the caller.

The pilot commenced with one small team of six staff comprising three experienced staff and three new recruits, with a supervisor who had been involved in the change process and could support them.

The pilot has now moved to two small teams of similar numbers and experience.

The training involved:

- a refresh of the National Decision Model (NDM)
- a refresh of THRIVE
- training on conversation management tactics
- training on SAR with a few practical examples to be worked through

The call management support unit 'dip sample' calls for the entire control room as part of their quality control remit, and are monitoring the pilot call quality regarding the following:

- the call handler was not missing vulnerability or risk
- the call was being accurately summarised
- the calls were being accurately graded
- comparison between THRIVE and SAR (before and after pilot)
- comparison between THRIVE and SAR in capturing previous vulnerability (repeat calls)
- comparison of call times before/after SAR running alongside THRIVE as the benchmark
- comparison in deployment times before/after SAR (record of contact to despatch terminal)
- comparison of pilot regrades (challenge only)

Evaluation

An evaluation was conducted by the force. This involved a survey which was sent to users of the SAR in the pilot group two weeks after the start of the pilot. The survey sought to understand what they thought of the method and how it could be improved.

As well as monitoring data for the pilot group and the control group (in another team of the control room with a similar make up in terms of experience), the data assesses:

- Call quality/THRIVE, measured by the call management support team listening to pilot calls and assuring them against whether any element of THRIVE had been missed that should have been included, whether the summary provided an accurate picture of the call details and whether there was a rationale for the call grading provided.
- Call time, measured by the call duration for both 999 calls and 101 calls.
- Deployment time, measured by the time between grading and deployment.
- Call regrading, measured as a monthly percentage of the number of calls reassessed (up or down) as requiring a different call grade.

Overall impact

The following early results are based on a comparison of call handlers who started at the same time, some of whom are part of the SAR pilot and the others operating current THRIVE policy and procedure.

999 calls

The SAR pilot members reduced their call handling from an average of 15 minutes to eight minutes.

The non-pilot members reduced their call handling time from 17.30 minutes to 13.45 minutes.

New crime

The SAR pilot members reduced their call handling from an average of 15 minutes to eight minutes.

The non-pilot members reduced their call handling from an average 17.30 minute to 13.30 minutes.

Update a crime

The SAR pilot members reduced their call handling from an average of 15.30 minutes to 9.30 minutes.

The non-pilot members reduced their call handling from an average of 15:15 minutes to 12 minutes.

Learning

The pilot is still in early stages. Learning will be gathered as the pilot progresses.

The training has been delivered in small groups of no more than five staff members. While this has been time consuming, it has been hugely beneficial in ensuring staff fully understand the process and are confident in using the new model.

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