

ABSTRACTS

Practical implications of the plasticity of the short-term memory span: Enhancing the combat mindset of the Norwegian Police Force

Ole Boe - Norwegian Defence University College

Glenn-Egil Torgersen - Norwegian Defence University College

The aim of this paper is to discuss how it is possible to function with a high degree of cognitive pressure when facing unforeseen situations. The background is the idea that it is possible to increase individual coping under stress based upon the plasticity of the capacity span in the short-term memory. A second aim of the paper is to discuss how to practice in order to build a better combat mindset to be able to function better in unforeseen situations. This paper's starting point is the apparent lack of a proper combat mindset evident in the Norwegian Police Force when faced with the terrorist attacks that took place in Norway on the 22nd of July 2011. It was also evident that the police officers involved in the terrorist attacks suffered from high levels of cognitive pressure. The terrorist attacks are shortly discussed, and then we define what is meant by a professional combat mindset. After this, we continue to discuss the major challenges linked to the current mindset in the Norwegian Police Force as it appeared on the 22nd of July in 2011. After this, we describe what we meant by a professional combat mindset, and then we relate this to the major challenges of the Norwegian Police Force. Continuing this line of thought, we elaborate upon how an experienced stress reaction may affect one's ability to solve a mission, and increase the cognitive pressure experienced in acute stressful situations. We describe what a well-functioning combat mindset is by giving a narrative from an Norwegian military officer serving on an international operation in Afghanistan. The next part of the paper deals with how to cope with stress and the importance of an efficient combat mindset. We then describe which techniques that work in order to build an efficient combat mindset. Furthermore, we describe what an extreme cognitive pressure is and how an efficient combat mindset is related to lower levels of cognitive pressure. Finally, we suggest a method for practicing combat mindset referred to as CM-training. A conclusion is that it would have been possible for the Norwegian Police to have a better combat mindset and experience less cognitive pressure during the incident at Utøya on 22 July. Reaching this is however a relevant challenge in order to create an efficient and effective police force. For this to happen, several combat mindset techniques and combat mindset training must be included in the education given to the Norwegian Police Force. This combat mindset training needs to include both realistic training and systematic reflection if one want a better ability to deal with sudden and unforeseen events. After such training, the cognitive pressure that the police officers will experience in future unforeseen situation will most likely be less and result in better performance.