



## Interaction, Insight and Imagination, and Initiative...The Building Blocks of Police Operational Art

By Fred Leland

*“The essence of winning and losing is in learning how to shape or influence events so that we not only magnify our spirit and strength but also influence potential adversaries as well as the uncommitted so that they are drawn toward our philosophy and are empathetic towards our success.” ~Col. John Boyd*

Operational art in the world of conflict is the link that synergistically connects strategy and tactics. Conflict is a clash between multiple complex adaptive systems trying to impose itself on the other. Conflict can turn violent or it can be resolved peacefully. Our strategy as protection professionals is to impose our will on the adversary. To do so we must use our ability to interact with our adversary who is an independent and animate force with its own objectives and plans. Interaction helps you control the dynamics of the situation on your terms.

Superior situational awareness and ongoing interaction such as communication, negotiation, tactical movement both overt and covert and tactical set up will help reduce uncertainty and open up opportunities for us to use our insight and imagination to adapt tactics to an evolving situation and seize the initiative.

This ability to use insight and imagination and apply knowledge through initiative-driven interaction with our environment, and the *climate (what’s happening?)* of the situation, considering both adversarial and friendly situation and their affect on the moral, mental and physical dimensions of conflict is known as operational art.

Strategy and tactics is both art and science. When we learn tactics we learn in a way that builds off of certain ideas and principles that have been used in engagements throughout history. Police tactics are based on military tactics with the obvious adaptation by police to the civil side of keeping order and solving problems. In the end tactics are methods we use to help us win the numerous types engagements we find ourselves in. Interaction is a tactic or methods used to help you gain control.

Winning requires knowing many things, including an understanding of the environment, the climate of the situation, psychology, physiology, decision making, combative skills, firearms skills, leadership and the overall mission or intent. In an engagement all these factors combine in a synergistic way and require interaction with your adversary(s), fellow officers and the community. Interaction with your

adversary(s) allows you to gather actionable information to utilize in your efforts to solve whatever strategic and tactical problem you face.

Information you have gathered only becomes actionable if you have the ability to take what you know and apply it in a way that accords with the circumstances and your overall intent. You must always keep in mind that it is impossible to control exactly how the adversary(s) will respond to your actions. So the goal is to control the adversary's mindset with both direct and/or indirect action which takes thinking and adaptability.

Insight and imagination is needed to adapt tactics and apply them in an innovative way to the particular problem at hand. The ability to apply these attributes in a violent encounter puts you in a position of advantage. You can then seize the initiative on your terms. You control the tempo of things with interaction--moving in, tactically loitering, communication, deception, force options, etc., and focus your efforts to prevent or resolve the problem. This is known as "operational art" a much needed concept to understand if we are to connect our endgame (strategy) with how we play the game (tactics).

*"Everything man is and does is modified by learning and is therefore malleable. But once learned, these behavior pattern, these habitual responses, these ways of interacting gradually sink below the surface of the mind and like the admiral of a submerged submarine fleet, control from the depths. The hidden controls are usually experienced as though they were innate simply because they are not only ubiquitous but habitual as well.' ... The only time one is aware of the control system is when things don't follow the hidden program. This is most frequent in intercultural encounters. Therefore the great gift that members of the human race have for each other is not exotic experiences but an opportunity to achieve awareness of the structure of their own system, which can be accomplished only by interacting with others who do not share that system..." ~Edward T. Hall*

Learning, unlearning and re-learning is the core of adaptation, and adaptation is the crux of operational art.

Adaptation comes from understanding these key attributes and how to apply them. They are the building blocks to applying a sound operational art. Skills plus attributes equal readiness!

Definitions of attributes that apply to operational art:

- *Interaction-when two people or two sides interact they have an effect on one another. This effect can through tactical savvy allow us to exploit our adversary's decision making process and open up opportunities for us to seize the advantage and gain control.*
- *Insight-is the ability to observe and orient intuitively to openings or advantages given up by our adversary and then see how we may adapt the science of tactics in an artful yet skillful way to the unfolding conditions.*
- *Imagination-is the ability to form mental images of the necessary tactics and how they apply to the ongoing situation in accordance with our strategy. Imagination enhances decision making!*

- *Initiative-All action in conflict, regardless of level, is based upon either taking the initiative or reaction in response to the adversary. By taking the initiative, we dictate the terms of the conflict and force the adversary to meet us on our terms. The initiative allows us to pursue some positive aim even if only to preempt an adversary's initiative. It is through the initiative that we seek to impose our will on the adversary. This is the action phase!*

Here is an example:

You respond to a residence along with two other officers for a domestic disturbance. On your way to the location you interact and communicate over the radio with dispatch gather information that is pertinent to your response considerations. You learn it's a verbal altercation between husband and wife and that the husband is drunk and that the wife wants him out.

You know that domestic violence calls even those of a verbal dynamic can turn to physical violence quickly so understanding the sense of urgency and that we must set up a tactical response and approach. You and the two responding officers interact and agree the best approach will be to rally at a location down the street from the particular address and approach the scene on foot.

As you approach you can hear shouting coming from the house you quickly communicate and develop a plan where one officer will take the 1 and 2 corners of the single family home and the second officer will take 3 and 4 corners of the building as you engage the husband and wife. Once you determine by looking covertly through a window there are no weapons and that it is indeed just a verbal altercation you call out to the husband and wife who immediately stop shouting at one another and welcome you in. You hand signal the officer at the 1 and 2 corner to be your cover man and he takes up a position inside as well and calls for the 3 and 4 corner man to enter and assist in gathering information from one of the spouses. In domestic situations, it is usually best to separate the arguing couples so emotions are quelled.

*This three man team interacting and using collaborative insight and imagination with one another has allowed them to safely approach, separate and contain the subjects and gather more information. This information gathered has allowed them to make a determination as to what action to take. They decide that no criminal act has occurred but have talked the male subject into leaving for the night and to stay with a friend, who will meet him at the station.*

The male subject is intoxicated but is not falling down drunk, and he asks for a favor. "Can I go out and close my shed doors before I leave?" You agree, but decide to walk with him as a safety precaution. As you step out the back door you notice the yard is a mess there is junk everywhere in the back yard.

You and the subject continue to speak as he walks toward the shed that you can see and the doors are open. The subject walks inside and reaches up on the counter and slugs down another beer contained in a coolly. You tell him to show some respect and he bows his head humbly and apologizes for the disrespect. As he starts to close the shed doors he asks you what you think of the four foot saw blade he has hung on the shed door. You look and ask, "where

the hell did you get that from?" He tells you he found it on the side of the road one day and that he just loved the damn thing.

You begin to get a funny feeling inside telling you this guy is up to something. He seems to be stalling and talking about foolish things that most would probably not talk about knowing they were being forced out of their own home for the night. He closes the shed doors and begins to walk back towards the house when he suddenly stops and asks you, "Do you mind if I straighten up the back yard?" He begins to bend down and reach for a 2X4. In an instant your gut is screaming "why does he want to clean the yard now," the same yard that looks like it has not been cleaned up in the past 20 years? You move in and place him in handcuffs. He offers no resistance. His stay with a friend to sober up has now become a stay with the police.

This is an example of *operational art* although there are flaws in judgment such as, *letting him go to the shed in the first place*. The point is not about being flawless, because flawlessness is rare in conflict and violence. We can easily ask the question, "What would have happened if you told him you cannot close the shed?" Would this have escalated the situation? Would you been more prepared at that point inside with no room to maneuver? The point is, did our awareness level and the interaction with our adversary open up opportunities for us to adapt? The answer is yes it did. Opportunity opened up to both sides as interaction will do. Risk at times will go up when we interact close up with an adversary. There is always give and take, move and counter moves when dealing with conflict. Your awareness level must be superior when you are interacting with an adversary. Did we see opportunities and then use our insight and imagination to seize the initiative on our terms? Yes we did. In the end no struggle or assault took place nor did he make an overt act to assault although my insight and intuition says he was most definitely thinking about it.

A honed Boyd Cycle will give you insight as to what's happening. You will recognize signs and signals, patterns of behavior that make sense or seem out of the norm allowing you to feed off and understand the unfolding circumstances. Through experience you will develop a *fingertip feel* for *operational art*, which you can nurture only through hard work. The lessons learned allow you to use interaction, insight, imagination and initiative driven tactics to the situation at hand and winning on your terms.

*"Pressing down the pillow refers to one's efforts to let the head of one's opponent rise. In battles based on martial strategy, it is taboo to let your opponent take the initiative, thus putting yourself on the defensive. You must try at all costs to lead your opponent by taking complete control of him. During combat, your opponent intends to dominate you as much as you want to dominate him, so it is vital that you pick up on your opponent's intentions and tactics so as to control him... According to the principle of martial strategy, you must be able to control your opponent(s) at all times. Study this point well. ~Miyamoto Musashi*