

Facilitating collective decision-making

Tasks

Task I: How might a coordinator manage the following situations?

Task II: How might a coordinator mitigate, or prevent such situations or behaviour in the first place?

You have 20 minutes

Deadlock and competition

Overt competition, even conflict, has emerged among partners. Attempts to achieve consensus increasingly end in deadlock. Positions and interests are ever-more polarised. Two cliques (informal, inward looking sub-groups) 'pre-cook' issues and debates to their own benefit. To make matters worse, at least once, a partner's headquarters has contradicted what had previously been said by their cooperative local representative. The headquarters aggressively pushes an agenda that favours their public image and fund-raising. In private discussions, some members of the group express frustration with what they regard as inflexible, untrustworthy and domineering counter-parts. They point to behaviour that borders on reckless bullying.

Confusion, lack of direction

The emergency operation is getting increasingly complex. On the one hand, refugees continue to arrive in large numbers. On the other, the situation appears to be sliding into a protracted, directionless ordinariness. And agencies show signs of being out of their 'comfort-zones' (what they are confident they can achieve) working with dispersed populations in both urban and rural environments. Their understanding of and relations with what they perceive to be weak and uncertain municipal authorities is limited. Too many, or too few options, multiple dilemmas and fragmented approaches and priorities complicate decision-making. An unwillingness, or incapacity to recognize and fill gaps, despite words to the contrary, results in a lack of action.

Apathy and mindless obstruction

The coordination group stands out as being notably unremarkable. Nothing seems to motivate or enthuse most members. An air of apathy permeates coordination efforts. Members contribute little, but insist on their 'place-at-the-table' and their right to obstruct or veto decision-making, whenever they wish. Such approaches do not seem to be founded on any particular organizational interests or competition. They look to have more to do with individual personalities: the skeptical cynic; the stand-offish, uninvolved but easily angered observer; the ever-present critic; the bored on-looker; the continual objection-raiser; the verbose talker; and the muddled, unclear, poor communicator. One wonders how they came to represent their agencies in such important discussions.