**1.6 Soft Skills** for Coordination

**Day 1:  15:30-16:30 (60 min)**

**Session Purpose:**

To provide an overview of important meeting management, consensus building and conflict management skills and behaviours that can support effective cluster/sector performance.

**Learning Objectives:**

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

* Identify common challenges to cluster coordination meetings.
* Identify tips and tools for improving coordination meeting management and facilitation.
* Describe actions to take before, during and after cluster meetings to ensure their effectiveness.
* List three alternatives to conducting a meeting and when it would be appropriate to use them.
* Describe how to build consensus in the context of cluster coordination.
* List key tips for resolving conflict and handling impasse

**Outline of the Session**:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Time** | **Guidance note for facilitator** |
| Introduction to Meeting Management | 10’ | Participants brainstorm challenges and positives they experience with the current coordination meetings.   |
| Group work – Key tips for effective meeting management  | 35’ | In 4 groups develop good practice tips for before, during and after meetings and alternatives to meeting. One topic per group, then debrief. |
| Consensus Building Presentation | 7’ | Summarise consensus building good practice through the PowerPoint presentation |
| Conflict Management Presentation  | 8’ | PowerPoint presentation with plenary discussions drawing out tips from their experience.  |

**Session Materials:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **General** | **HO=Handouts (1 per person) and** **R =Resources (copy per instructions)** | **Electronic References** |
| PowerPoint PresentationFlip chartsMarkers | 1.6 HO All in Diary Meeting Management1.6 HO NC Meeting agenda template1.6 HO NC Meeting minutes template1.6 HO Learning Leadership Styles | * All in Diary Multi Language Meetings
* Conflict Resolution and Consensus
 |

**Facilitator notes**:

The session is aimed at highlighting essential soft skills for effective meetings and facilitation that participants will be encouraged to practice in this work.. It is important to draw on the experience of the participants.

**Introduction to Meeting Management (10 minutes)**

How well a meeting is facilitated and the result it produces influences how actors view the cluster approach and your ability as Cluster Coordinator.  If meetings are badly run, actors often will find or set-up parallel and competing meeting structures to meet their needs.  Knowing how to manage and facilitate effective meetings is therefore a core skill for a Cluster Coordinator.

Also, one of the findings in the IASC evaluations of the cluster approach is the need to improve the management and facilitation of cluster/sector meetings.

**BUT,** not everything happens in meetings!

In this session you will develop good practice tips for meeting management and outline alternatives to meetings.

General brainstorm onto the flipchart:

*Q:  What are challenges to effective coordination meetings?*

Debrief the responses. Contrast the previous discussion question with a final plenary discussion on positive meeting management behaviours participants have experienced

**Group work: Key tips for effective meeting management**

**(35 minutes = 5 min introduction, 15 min group work, 15 min debrief)**

Explain that one of the key points to understand that meetings are part of a ***process*** that requires effective leadership in order to achieve the best possible ***outcomes*** for affected people. Both the process and outcomes are part of our mutual or shared accountability towards affected people. Poorly-run cluster meetings that don't contribute to better results for them can be considered as misuse of resources (time, human resources, financial) that could be used to support responses, so consider the time and effort that goes into meetings, and how to use them to focus on results for affected people, in line with CHS commitments

1 Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant

2 Effective and timely

3 strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects

6 and, coordinated and complimentary

9 Resources are managed responsibly and for their intended purpose

Divide into 4 groups to come up with key tips and suggestions on how to ensure meetings engage ‘partners’ and are effective in achieving goals.  Assign them each a part of the process, have them brainstorm and note on flipcharts (15 minutes or less).

Show the PowerPoint Group work: Key tips for effective and participatory meetings.

Group 1 – BEFORE – key actions you need to take

Group 2 – DURING – key actions/skills for effective meeting

Group 3 – AFTER – key actions to take after

Group 4 – Alternatives to meetings and when it is appropriate to use them

Then ask groups to feedback one at a time.  Reinforce key points using the following PowerPoints as appropriate for each phase.  10 min - manage time well (2.5 minutes per group).

Key tips are summarized in the slides and can be used to summarise the plenary feedback.

**Key Messages:**

* A meeting is only part of the cluster coordination process
* Preparing for, conducting and wrapping up after a meeting are equally important
* Effective facilitation is a key coordination skill.
* There are numerous alternatives for meetings.

Explain that now we will cover two further core competencies for effective coordination:

* consensus building:  what it means and how to achieve it
* conflict management: problems, benefits and tips.

**Consensus Building (7 minutes)**

Consensus building is only one form of decision-making. There is a time and place for other options – but it is an important form of decision-making in a Cluster context, particularly if one of our aims is to strengthen and support local capacities.

Explain that consensus is not about getting everyone 100% behind the idea – it’s about ‘weight of opinion’ and acknowledging when there is significant "dissent" (however small), and being able to justify a decision or a course of action based on the inputs of all.

Show the next PowerPoint on Building Consensus. Consensus building processes use different skills and activities.

Discuss:

* **when to use consensus** (when have time to explore all views; when important to have everyone on board; when no ‘right answers’)
* **when not to** (other method of decision making more effective; solutions obvious; standards will be compromised; very extreme views).

Effective consensus building requires:

* Time
* Right leadership style
* Everyone willing to get involved
* Openness and honesty (no hidden games)
* Willingness to acknowledge different opinions

Facilitating consensus

* W*hat are the key skills for facilitating consensus building?* – include being calm and respectful; listen and ask questions; communicate clearly.
* Introduce Rackham and Morgan’s guidelines for facilitating discussions. 70’s research into most productive teams indicated what kind of contributions you need to encourage from people round the table.
* *If time is short and/or the group have strong facilitation skills, this section could be reduced or cut – though there are important messages for running effective meetings.*

Need to be sensitive to cultural diversity and local context to ensure any decisions reflect the views of all participants as much as possible

**Conflict Management Presentation (8 minutes)**

Debrief with slides. Note that:

* Conflict can appear to be about personalities when in fact it can be triggered by another issue.  Not all issues are within your control but you can bring these into the open, and minimize the causes of conflict
* In many cases, the lack of information, or the lack of a joint analysis and common understanding of that information can lead to different opinions and conflicts on deciding the most appropriate actions to take.
* Conflict isn’t always a bad thing, it just need to be managed, usually with good leadership. It can sometimes lead to a better approach or solution to a response problem.
* Keeping the focus on the needs, rights, and perspectives of affected people can be a good way of keeping conflicts away from unproductive discussions on personalities or institutional positions, to one of finding appropriate solutions.
* It may also be possible to use competing approaches as a way to come up with a new test and validate the effectiveness of those approaches, and through this, find new ways of working, etc.

Work through the rest of the slides, drawing out ideas from the participants on:

* What skills are required to handle conflict?
* How to handles impasse?

**Key Messages:**

* Consensus building is a key decision-making method in the coordination context.
* Achieving maximum agreement amongst a diverse set of stakeholders takes effective facilitation and active listening skills.
* Conflict is not always a bad thing, but coordinators need to tackle it early.
* Focusing on the needs, rights and perspectives of affected people is a good guide to finding appropriate solutions to conflict.