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NGO Crisis Management Exercise Manual

A guide to developing
and facilitating
effective exercises

Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF)

- GISF is a peer-to-peer network of security focal points who represent over 140 aid organizations operating internationally.
- GISF is committed to achieving sustainable access for populations in need and keeping aid workers safe.
- As a member-led NGO forum, GISF harnesses the collective knowledge of its members to drive positive change in the humanitarian security risk management (SRM) sector through thought leadership, original research, events and more.

*For GISF, **humanitarian** refers to not-for-profit activities that seek to improve lives and reduce suffering.*

GISF is a collaborative forum and believes that breaking down silos and pooling expertise from a variety of sectors is crucial for improving SRM in the humanitarian sector. As such we facilitate exchange between member organizations and other bodies such as the UN, institutional donors, academic and research institutions, the private sector and a broad range of international NGOs.

GISF takes an inclusive approach to SRM and doesn't believe in 'one-size-fits-all' security. We recognize that different staff face different risks, based on the diversity of their profiles, their context, their role and organization.

In a rapidly changing humanitarian landscape, GISF values the importance of continuous innovation and adaptation. We strive to improve practice by producing original research and practical guides that fill knowledge gaps across the sector. The forum also invests in capacity building by promoting learning through training and events, and an online resource hub.

GISF is an independent entity currently funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and member contributions.

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Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) – International Development Sector Committee (IDSC)

The U.S. Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) is a public-private partnership that keeps the Diplomatic Security Service connected with U.S. organizations operating abroad. Through ongoing threat awareness and crisis support, consultations, analysis, training, events, and trusted peer network groups, OSAC works together to protect U.S. interests overseas.

The OSAC International Development Sector Committee (IDSC) is an OSAC member group that focuses on the security issues affecting U.S. international development and humanitarian organizations operating outside the United States. OSAC IDSC's goal is to enable its members to internally collaborate, network, and benchmark on international safety and security issues. The IDSC offers year-round training, events, and facilitates the exchange of timely information and best practices.

General membership in the IDSC is open to OSAC members working at any for-profit or not-for-profit organization, involved in the direct implementation of international development and humanitarian assistance. Member representatives must be operationally responsible for the safety and security of their organization's staff, assets, and interests.



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About this manual

This manual provides NGO security staff with resources to support them in developing and facilitating effective crisis management exercises for strengthening an organization's crisis response capability. The manual complements other essential GISF resources such as ***Crisis Management of Critical Incidents***, ***Family First: Liaison and support during a crisis*** and ***Managing the Message: Communication and media management in a security crisis*** which provide guidance on the management of critical incidents.

The manual is organized into four sections, each covering a crucial aspect of the exercise development and facilitation process, with practical guidance and useful tools to support each stage of the process.

Who is the manual for?

The manual is aimed principally at security leads within international development, humanitarian, human rights, and peace and democracy organizations who are looking to facilitate crisis management exercises for other organizations, as part of a peer-to-peer exchange. However, it is equally relevant for those looking to undertake or facilitate exercises within their own organizations.

Whether you are new to facilitating crisis management exercises and looking for helpful hints, or seeking ideas to enhance your existing exercises, the manual provides practical guidance and useful insights into the design, preparation, delivery, and learning from crisis management exercises.

About the IDSC Tabletop Exchange Initiative

Initial ideas for an NGO peer exchange program for crisis management exercises emerged from the OSAC IDSC Steering Committee in November 2021 when members identified a gap in interactive exchange between peer organizations in the NGO security sector on crisis management. IDSC Steering Committee members Matthew Mead and Vitaliya Peake came up with the idea of an informal peer exchange program and identified the need for a manual that would not only cover topics of crisis management, but also delve into the nuances of facilitating exercises for an external organization. IDSC Steering Committee members highlighted that, given the time, finance, and other costs inherent with hiring outside vendors to conduct exercises, NGOs should collaborate to facilitate exercises for each other, thereby minimizing costs, and benefiting from the existing knowledge, expertise, and experience in the sector. Furthermore, by collaborating with and supporting each other, NGO security leads would be able to participate fully in their own organization's exercises, rather than leading them. Security professionals early in their career, or those with less crisis management experience, would also gain valuable knowledge and experience.

With the aim of better stewarding donor resources, fostering collaboration, and working together as a community, the IDSC launched the Tabletop Exchange Initiative. Knowing the expertise GISF held on crisis management and wanting to foster increased collaboration between the two organizations, the IDSC Steering Committee reached out to GISF with a scope of work and vision for the project. IDSC and GISF have partnered to develop this manual to support NGOs in facilitating crisis management exercises as part of the initiative. Throughout 2022, the two organizations worked together to bring in NGO crisis management experts to develop and provide inputs on the manual. This culminated in a workshop focused on the implementation of the manual at the IDSC Fall 2022 in-person event in Washington, D.C. The manual can be used to support organizations involved in the peer exchange program, as well as for in-house exercises. The IDSC continues to monitor community interest in potential peer exchanges and can put interested individuals in contact with one another.



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Introduction

The threats confronting aid workers are rising significantly. The environments in which NGO staff travel and work delivering programs around the world present considerable risks to their security, safety, health and wellbeing. In the face of such threats, organizations have a duty to ensure an effective and timely response to critical incidents and emergency situations involving their staff, wherever they occur.

Whilst each incident is unique and requires a tailored response, it is paramount that before an incident occurs, measures and capacities are in place that will enable an organization to effectively manage potential crisis situations. Preparation, through a combination of detailed plans, trained staff, and specialist support, is vital for the successful management of any incident, especially where a coordinated, effective response involving different locations and stakeholders is required.

Crisis Management Exercises (CMEs) are an integral component of an organization's preparedness strategy. Having a plan is not merely enough; organizations also need to 'learn by doing'. Crisis Management Teams (CMTs) need the opportunity to practice potential responses and test various assumptions to ensure they can coordinate and respond effectively to critical incidents. Learning from exercises, and identifying gaps in plans prior to a real incident, can significantly strengthen an organization's crisis management capabilities, and ultimately help ensure a more positive outcome.



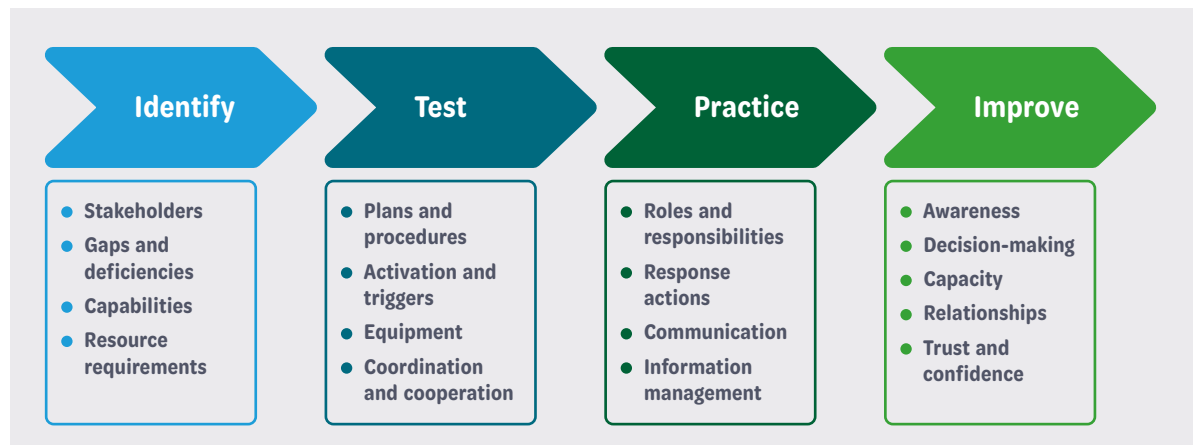
Crisis Management Exercise

A Crisis Management Exercise is a controlled activity designed to simulate real-life situations for the purpose of training, assessing crisis management capabilities, and testing response procedures and plans.

What are the benefits of exercises?

CMEs are proactive tools used to progressively build an organization's capacity to manage a wide range of critical situations involving staff and operations. Initial workshops or discussion-based exercises will help organizations **identify** and understand who should be involved in responding to crisis, what capacity there is, and potential gaps. Progressing on to more immersive simulation-based exercises enables organizations to **test** existing plans and structures in a realistic environment.

CMEs must not be one-off events. Regular **practice** of crisis response actions and communications will **improve** awareness, lead to better decision-making, and increase trust and confidence in an



organization's capacity to respond to emergency situations. CMEs also provide valuable opportunities for stakeholders to meet, in person or virtually, to build relationships and work together to improve coordination in times of crisis.

CMEs range from informal discussions on responding to particular situations, to 'live' full-scale simulations that comprehensively test an organization's emergency response and management systems. The scope and complexity of the exercise required depends on the overall goal, the CMT's experience, and the resources available. However, it is important to stress that exercises are only part of the solution. Effective crisis management requires the right structure, comprehensive plans, and an ongoing mix of trainings and exercises that build on existing expertise as part of a broader strategy to develop the organization's crisis response capability.

What makes a good exercise?

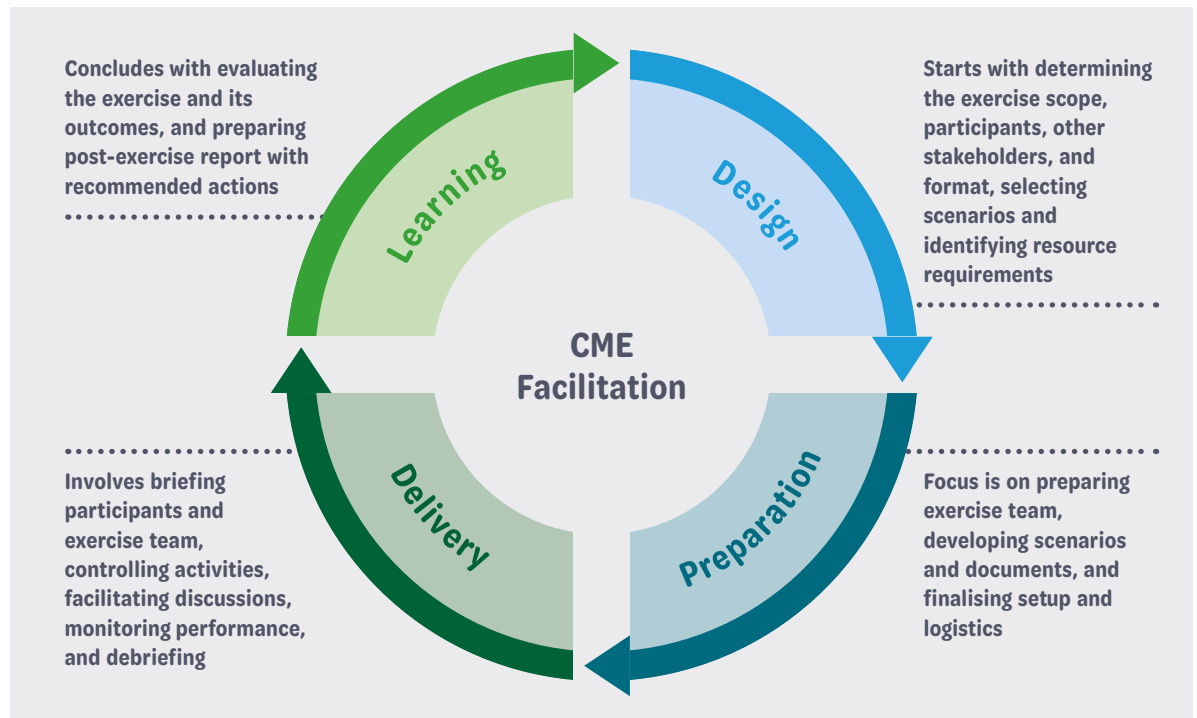
When designing and delivering a good crisis management exercise, consider these key principles:

- **Get senior leadership buy-in** – before planning an exercise it is essential to ensure that it has the support of senior management and, depending on the CMT structure, their involvement in the actual exercise.
- **Work with an established CMT** – while exercises can be run in advance of formalizing the CMT, ideally the CMT should be already established, with functions and responsibilities clearly defined.
- **Allow time for planning** – good exercises take time to plan, so make sure sufficient time is factored in for design and preparation.
- **Ensure sufficient funds** – while exercises can run on a limited budget, good simulation-based exercises are not cheap, so ensure there are appropriate resources.
- **Be relevant** – although fictitious, scenarios must be perceived as plausible and realistic to maximize participant engagement, and so should be customized to the organization and its specific operational context.
- **Be challenging, but not overwhelming** – exercises must challenge but not confuse or overwhelm participants. Mistakes are an essential part of the learning, so long as participants recognize and understand the impact of incorrect decisions or inactions.
- **Engage all functions** – build an exercise and select scenarios that actively engage all functions of the CMT and give the opportunity for them to explore their specific roles and responsibilities.
- **Create the right environment** – ensure that the venue (or virtual platform) and the equipment used allow a realistic delivery of the scenario. Ideally, use the same locations or settings that would be used to manage a real crisis.
- **Capture the learning** – after any exercise, debriefs and reports should capture the key issues raised and identify areas for improvement. Where possible, designate an individual not involved in the exercise to capture the learnings and ideas raised.



TOOLS & RESOURCES: Tool 1 – Exercise Facilitation Checklist

The success of any exercise depends on a structured approach. The CME facilitation model highlights the key phases required to design, prepare, deliver, and learn from an effective exercise.



What makes a good peer exchange?

Across the NGO sector, peer-to-peer learning communities, or communities of practice, are a well-established means to share knowledge between organizations and learn from one another. In the context of facilitating crisis management exercises, the peer exchange model involves the security lead from one organization facilitating an exercise for another, and vice versa.

Conducting crisis management exercises through a peer exchange partnership enables you, as the security lead, to fully participate in your own organization's exercise rather than facilitating it. This will allow you to assume your actual role and responsibilities during the exercise, making it more realistic. The peer exchange model also provides the opportunity for an external, more objective assessment of the host organization's crisis response systems and capabilities. Key to a successful peer exchange is identifying the right partner. When establishing a peer exchange partnership, consider the following:

- **Shared values and activities** – pairing with an organization that shares similar values or activities to yours will enable a better understanding of your organization's approach and operations, and a greater appreciation of the specific risks and challenges it faces.
- **Similar experiences and capacities** – pairing with an organization with similar level of experience and capacity (i.e. crisis management structures, support provision, and resources) provides a more equitable learning opportunity for both organizations. While it is also possible to partner with more experienced organizations, the benefits may be less equal. Avoid partnerships where both organizations have very little crisis management experience.
- **Trust and confidence** – trust is a vital element in any organizational partnership, but equally critical is having trust and confidence in the individual facilitator. For further information on identifying the right facilitator see page 19.
- **Clear objectives and expectations** – establish the objectives and expectations of the peer exchange right from the start. Determine how the partnership will work and agree specific responsibilities of

both parties, captured within a Terms of Reference (ToR) or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the partnership.

- **Adequate preparation** – the level of coordination and preparation required by the host organization should not be underestimated. The success of the exercise will depend on factors in the host organization’s control, for example, whether information and resources needed to develop and facilitate the exercise are available and accessible to the facilitator.
- **Privacy and confidentiality** – it is very likely that the facilitator will be exposed to sensitive information about the host organization. Clarify how privacy and confidentiality issues between the facilitator and host organization will be handled and any legal requirements, such as the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs).

1

Designing the exercise

Exercise design is the first step of facilitating any crisis management exercise. This is where you'll determine the scope and objectives of the exercise, and research the organization, mapping key stakeholders, likely interactions and how information flows during a crisis. You will also identify the exercise participants, determine the format of the exercise and potential scenario themes, and identify the resources required to run the exercise.

1.1 Exercise aim and objectives

Running any CME is a resource intensive process, both in planning and during the exercise itself. Getting it right starts by being clear on what you are trying to achieve by running the exercise. For example, is the goal to promote crisis management awareness amongst members of a newly formed CMT, or within the organization's senior management? Is the intention to evaluate and improve the organization's crisis management response, or its preparedness for specific types of incidents? Depending on your aim, different types of exercise, different scenarios, and in some cases different participants will be required.

Establishing clear, realistic and measurable objectives will also help you frame the exercise design. CME objectives should outline what is to be achieved by participating in the exercise. For example, a specific objective may be to validate the organization's crisis management structure and to ensure that all CMT members understand their roles and responsibilities.

When defining the aim and objectives of the exercise, establishing early dialogue with the host organization will ensure clear understanding of their requirements and help manage expectations. As an external facilitator you will need to collaborate closely with someone from the organization during the design stage (ideally, this person would not be a member of the CMT, to maintain the element of surprise during the exercise). In some cases, forming a small exercise planning group with representatives from different departments will help to bring a range of perspectives to the design of the exercise.



SMART objectives

- **Specific** – be clear and specific in terms of what outcomes will be achieved through the exercise.
- **Measurable** – define the criteria used to measure progress for each objective e.g. identify specific actions or behaviors that you would expect to observe during or after the exercise.
- **Achievable** – ensure objectives are realistic and attainable within the parameters of the exercise. If you only have a few hours, is it a realistic objective to test and evaluate the organization's crisis management capabilities?
- **Relevant** – ensure exercise objectives are appropriate for the organization's risk profile and the needs of participants and align with the organization's broader crisis management goals.
- **Time-bound** – state when things should be achieved or actioned by attaching dates or timeframe to each objective e.g. to validate the organization's CMT structure, roles and responsibilities annually.

1.2 Organization profile

With several objectives in hand to guide the exercise design, the next step is to turn your attention to the organization itself, to understand its mission, values, operations, structures and internal dynamics, as they relate to critical incidents involving personnel.



Developing an organization profile

- **Understand the mission, vision and values** – identify the organization’s mission and vision statement, its core values and organizational culture, and consider how these may be perceived externally.
- **Identify locations, activities and risks** – understanding where the organization is working, the type of activities it is engaged in, and the risks that its staff and operations are exposed to will help identify possible scenario locations and events.
- **Establish profiles of personnel** – many organizations have a wide range of staff and ‘non-staff’ parties (consultants, visitors, dependants, volunteers, partners etc.) in their operations and activities. Understanding the different parties, their contractual relationship with the organization, and its obligations to them, will enable you to build a range of different stakeholders into the exercise.
- **Clarify structures and responsibilities** – Identify normal management structures, and how these may or may not change during a crisis. If the organization has a CMT established, determine who leads, what functions are represented, their roles and responsibilities, and the CMT’s relationship with other structures in the organization.
- **Ascertain experience and capability** – try to gauge the level of experience of individual CMT members, both in terms of previous exercises and dealing with real incidents. Determine if the CMT has been activated recently, what type of critical incidents the organization has experienced and, if possible, access any After Action Reviews. Assessing the CMT’s overall capability will help you select an effective exercise format and the level of complexity required.
- **Review existing plans and supporting documents** – determine what plans and documents for managing critical incidents already exist and factor these key documents and organizational processes into the exercise.
- **Map interactions and reporting lines** – identify and map likely interactions and information flows within the organization during a crisis. For example, how would initial incidents be reported, by what means and to whom? Who in senior management would typically be informed? Which external parties are likely to be involved?

Plausibility is a crucial factor in designing realistic exercises and keeping participants engaged. Using locations, structures, or interactions with limited relation to the organization will be distracting or confusing for participants, and can quickly undermine confidence in the exercise. The exercise, and the sequence of events and interactions within it, should reflect as closely as possible situations that participants feel are plausible for the organization.

1.3 Participants and other stakeholders

Involving the right participants is critical to the success of any exercise. CMEs can be run with only the CMT at the organization’s headquarters or involve incident management structures at different levels across the organization, including different departments and multiple locations. Whatever the size of the exercise, it is vital that selected participants are those that need to be involved and that the number of participants is manageable in relation to the scope of the exercise. While it may be

tempting to broaden participation, larger groups are more difficult to facilitate and can divert focus and discussions away from the exercise objectives. Potential participants include:

- **CMT members** – participants should be identified based on their respective functions and roles rather than as individuals. This minimizes reliance on specific individuals being present on the day of the exercise, enabling it to be carried out even in their absence as their designated function can be transferred to their alternates. Exercises should allow both the primary and alternates associated with key functions to participate.
- **Operational teams** – depending on the location of the scenario and the type of exercise planned, you may need to involve a specific country-level incident management team (IMT) or representatives from the respective regional and country teams, to advise the CMT on the country, program activities, and in-country/regional stakeholders. An objective of the exercise may be to test coordination and communication across different levels in the organization during a critical incident, therefore the participation of regional and country level incident management structures is crucial. Involving remote structures in CMEs is usually done virtually, so it is important to identify the ICT requirements to facilitate this.
- **Internal support pool** – many organizations operate with a core CMT structure and then pull in additional internal support depending on the nature of the incident, its location, and the stakeholders involved. Staff security and safety, safeguarding, finance and insurance, legal, ICT etc., may not be core CMT roles but could be part of a broader support pool. When designing an exercise, consider which internal functions should be involved and how to build their roles into the scenario.
- **External support providers** – real-life crises often require the CMT to seek advice or support from response consultants, consular services, or partner organizations to help them respond to the incident as it develops. Consider how to incorporate the roles of external support providers into the scenario. Reviewing the organization’s existing insurance policies will help identify potential external assistance providers. While it may not be possible to involve external partners in real-time (although this is valuable if the option is available), role players could play the part of assistance companies or partners. If external partners are willing to assist in the exercise, be sure to brief them fully in advance, explaining the exercise and your expectations.

Once all potential participants have been identified, be sure to invite them well in advance of the exercise and provide them with any required instructions or resources to secure their attendance and encourage active participation.

1.4 Exercise format

There are four key exercise formats used to develop an organization’s crisis management capacity – workshops, tabletop exercises, desktop simulations and full-scale simulations.

Which format is best to use depends on the maturity of the existing crisis management system, previous exercise experience, and the aim and objectives of the exercise. Other factors to consider when selecting the exercise format include the budget, venue and equipment requirements, and the availability of the CMT members and key stakeholders.

While there can be a temptation to throw everything into a crisis exercise, it is not advisable to begin with the more complex formats. Progression should be gradual, initially focusing on raising awareness and understanding before moving on to more advanced exercises. In some cases, a hybrid exercise may be required e.g. a tabletop exercise could benefit from a workshop to ensure all participants are familiar with basic crisis management principles before undertaking the exercise.

The following table summarizes the benefits and drawbacks of the four formats.

| Exercise types | | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Workshop | Tabletop Exercise | Desktop Simulation | Full-scale Simulation |
| Overview | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to familiarize participants with an organization's critical incident preparedness and response plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion-based exercise enabling participants to consider response actions, roles and responsibilities in relation to specific incident scenarios in a low-stress environment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables participants to practice coordination, response actions, and stakeholder engagement during an unfolding incident scenario within a simulated operational environment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully interactive exercise simulates actual response conditions in a time-pressured environment, to test and evaluate the capabilities of an organization's emergency response system. |
| Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-2 hours | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-4 hours (including briefing and debriefing) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 hours – 1 day (including briefing and debriefing) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between 1 and 1.5 days (including briefing and debriefing) |
| Advantages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective and efficient way for staff to become familiar with plan and processes. Workshop can be used to discuss specific incidents or explore certain aspects of the response plan. Requires limited time commitment from senior management. Short preparation time, low cost, informal. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideal for an organization that is still developing its crisis management capacity. Often accompanied with crisis management workshop/presentation before exercise. Exercise can explore number of different incident scenarios. Does not require an existing response plan or CMT to be in place, although this is recommended. Identifies gaps in awareness or understanding. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to build familiarity and confidence. Multiple procedures, structures, and roles can be practiced and reviewed during the simulated scenario. Involving different locations and structures enhances participation and realism. Useful for exploring decision-making, immediate action plans, stakeholder identification and engagement, and roles and responsibilities of CMT. Identifies gaps and breakpoints in existing plans and procedures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates a situation as close to an actual event as possible. Involves participation of roles and functions beyond CMT members. Exercises can be announced in advance or not; however, unannounced exercises require significant planning and are more disruptive. Tests participants' ability to shift from normal roles to their crisis roles. Realistic real-time interaction and communications. Allows utilization and testing of resources and response mechanisms that are not frequently activated or used. Builds and improves relationships with other agencies and stakeholders. |
| Disadvantages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited impact on crisis management capacity. Focus is only on orientating/ briefing senior managers or members of CMT. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not test or evaluate an organization's existing systems or capacity. Limited opportunity to practice responses. Lacks realism of simulation-based exercises. Requires careful facilitation to avoid extended policy discussions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires a small team of people to plan and deliver the exercise. Design and preparation requires more time. More expensive than workshop or tabletop exercise. Overwhelming for organizations with limited crisis management systems/capacity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only suitable for organizations with mature crisis response systems and experienced CMT. Extensive planning and preparation required. Requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders e.g. other departments, regional and country level teams, partners, and external support providers. Disruptive to workplaces and normal activities. Higher costs involved and extensive resource commitments required. |

1.5 Virtual exercises

Given the global nature of many organizations' management structures, in the event of a crisis it is highly unlikely that everyone involved will be seated in the same room. There will always be a remote element to the CMT structure and how it responds to critical incidents. It therefore makes sense to use available technology to familiarize participants with it, and to strengthen the realism of the exercise.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of various platforms to conduct virtual meetings and training provides an opportunity to reimagine what a CME looks like and how to involve virtual structures and participants based in multiple locations. In addition to the obvious financial benefits of running exercises virtually, it also makes participation from busy staff more likely. It is also easier for facilitators/observers to monitor multiple conversations and decisions during virtual exercises than with in-person exercises.

Another advantage of running virtual exercises is that it is easier to factor in information asymmetry, i.e. when different people get different information at different times. When participants are in the same room and you are running around handing out paper-based updates, it is obvious to everyone that something is happening. With virtual exercises, this is less evident.



Facilitating virtual exercises

- **Establish a plan** – as with in-person exercises, you need to develop a detailed exercise plan, outlining the aim, objectives and scope of the exercise, who is involved and how it will be run.
- **Consider limiting participation** – although virtual exercises enable broader participation, more people equates to more coordination and technology challenges. Restrict numbers to those needed to accomplish the exercise objectives.
- **Stick to platforms used regularly by the organization** – although platforms that can support virtual exercises are constantly evolving, unfamiliarity with platform controls can lead to delays and confusion during the exercise.
- **Provide exercise documentation in advance** – factor in more time to read into the exercise, and where possible share exercise documents and background materials in advance to give participants more time to digest the information.
- **Ensure enough exercise staff** – virtual exercises often require more support than in-person exercises. Assign one member of the exercise team as a direct point of contact for troubleshooting participant technology and accessibility issues during the exercise.
- **Create a back channel** – establish a separate communication platform for the exercise team to communicate during the exercise.
- **Consider recording exercises** – this will enable you to review key discussions or any decisions/ actions missed during the live exercise, to feedback during the debrief or pin the post-exercise report.
- **Make use of audio-visuals** – virtual exercises provide an opportunity to include more video footage into the exercise, for example news footage and stakeholder interviews, which can strengthen the exercise's realism.
- **Have role players engage in face-to-face interactions** – most new information is provided by updates, messages and phone calls. Virtual exercises provide the opportunity to include online face-to-face interactions with different stakeholders.
- **Use breakout rooms for task-focused discussions** – not all discussions need to involve all members of the CMT, so encourage participants to use breakout rooms and chat channels for smaller group discussions.

continued



Facilitating virtual exercises continued

- **Use sharable information displays** – ensure crisis logs and whiteboards are maintained on shareable platforms (Google Docs, Jamboard, Mural etc.) so all participants can review and edit online.
- **Have back up plans** – establish contingency platforms or teleconference lines so participants can transition to backup technology and limit exercise disruption.
- **Ensure plenty of breaks** – although in-person exercises are often run without set breaks to mimic real-life situations, online you need to encourage participants to take regular breaks.

While there are clearly benefits in running virtual exercises, they also have unique challenges. For example, people can only tolerate being online for short periods, therefore keeping participants engaged for longer exercises is challenging and facilitators must use a wide range of mechanisms and tools to ensure participants remain engaged. Poor connectivity and mastery of the platform controls can also be a barrier to participation, causing frustration and disengagement, and in the absence of in-person cues and body language, building relationships and trust is also more difficult in a virtual environment.

1.6 Exercise theme

The theme of the exercise must be agreed early in the design stage, even though the final detail of the scenario and the actual incidents involved will be developed later. For example, will the exercise be structured around the arrest of a staff member, a multi-casualty medical emergency, or staff fatalities due to a vehicle accident? Or will the focus be on more complex crisis situations such as a targeted attack or kidnapping incident involving staff from multiple organizations, with substantial media coverage?

The choice of theme depends on several factors, including the level of complexity required and the objectives that the exercise aims to address. Organizations may have a specific scenario in mind, based on their perceived risk exposure or to avoid scenarios used in previous exercises. The scenario should be challenging and realistic enough to ensure a high level of engagement from participants, and be based on credible threats in line with the activities and overall risk profile of the organization, but not so complex that it confuses participants or loses sight of the exercise objectives.

Exercise themes should always be identified after the aim and objectives of the exercise have been defined. Scenarios should be selected and designed to meet exercise objectives, and not vice versa. Deciding on a specific incident or event beforehand can constrain the exercise and may cause key elements to be omitted or overlooked.

To ensure an exercise meets its objectives, the scenario should not be known in advance by the participants. This element of surprise helps ensure that participants' reactions and decisions are more realistic. However, if you are working with a less experienced CMT, or the CMT includes several new members it may be useful to share basic details of the exercise theme in advance to allow participants time to prepare, for example identifying relevant policies and procedures, allowing them to contribute more effectively during the exercise.

1.7 Resource requirements

When designing an exercise, identify which resources you will need to run the exercise and any limitations or constraints this might present. Resource requirements vary widely depending on the type of exercise, and its scope and scale. Workshops and tabletop exercises tend to be cheapest and simplest to run, often delivered by a single facilitator, and require less ICT and admin support. Well run simulations require significantly more resources. Therefore, it is important to be realistic and not underestimate the preparation time involved or the staff and funds that will be required to support these exercises. Budgets for running CMEs will often be constrained, therefore you will probably need to revisit the aim and objectives of the exercise or the planned format to determine what is feasible given the level of resources available.

2

Preparing the exercise

Preparation is key to the success of any exercise. Once you have determined the aim, objectives and format of the exercise with the peer organization, or senior management, the next step is to draw up a detailed exercise plan, finalize the exercise facilitation team, develop the scenario and exercise documents, and identify your venue and ICT needs.

2.1 Exercise plan

The purpose of the exercise plan is to provide an overview of the exercise, outlining its aim, objectives, scope and format. It should also include details on the planned activities with dates and timings, the facilitation team involved, proposed participants and other key stakeholders, and administrative details, including venue, refreshment arrangements, and ICT requirements etc.

The exercise plan is not distributed to participants, but of course some of the information will need to be reproduced in the exercise instructions. An exercise plan can be developed using an established template, adding detail as planning progresses. For larger exercises, digital project management tools such as Gantt charts or flow charts can support the planning process.



TOOLS & RESOURCES: Tool 2 – Exercise Plan Template

2.2 Facilitation team

The exercise facilitation team is the group of people responsible for planning, conducting, supporting and evaluating the exercise. The exact composition of the team will depend on the type, scope and complexity of the exercise, but for simulation-based exercises it typically includes the following roles:

- **Facilitator** – the role of the facilitator is to oversee the overall design and planning of the exercise, and to coordinate its delivery. The facilitator will introduce the exercise, ensuring participants understand the objectives and how it will work, keep the scenario, its evolution and overall timings on track, and monitor the various discussions and decisions that occur during the exercise. As part of a peer exchange exercise, the facilitator would be the security lead from another organization. The choice of facilitator can ‘make or break’ a successful exercise, so choose carefully to ensure that the exercise objectives are met. For larger exercises it is useful to involve multiple facilitators.



Selecting a good facilitator

- **Positive attitude** – ensure there is a good fit between the facilitator and your organization, and they share similar values.
- **Confidence and trust** – participants should be confident and comfortable with the facilitator. It is important that participants perceive the facilitator in a neutral capacity.
- **Appropriate experience** – facilitators should be very knowledgeable on the subject matter, and ideally have some real-life experience in managing crisis situations.
- **Good communication skills** – facilitators should be able to keep participants engaged and maintain control of the exercise, keeping the agenda on track and discussions focused.
- **Strong observational skills** – facilitators should have a good understanding of group dynamics and experience in facilitating large groups at a senior level.

continued



Selecting a good facilitator *continued*

- **Create an inclusive environment** – facilitators must ensure all participants feel comfortable and confident contributing to discussions, regardless of positions and personality types, and be able deal with heated discussions or problem behavior if it occurs.
 - **Adaptability** – as things rarely go as planned in exercises, facilitators must be flexible and comfortable adapting plans, often at short notice, during the exercise.
-
- **Exercise support** – with any exercise there are multiple logistical and administration issues that must be addressed. If possible, it is extremely useful to have additional staff to assist with preparing materials, setting up the room and ICT equipment and connectivity, tracking the input of new information, and arranging refreshments etc.
 - **Role players** – some exercises require role players to inject realism into the event and to communicate information through phone calls or face-to-face meetings. It is important that role players have scripts or guidelines to help them act out specific roles. Role players will be required to fill several parts and need to be flexible and ready to improvise as it is difficult to predict exactly how the participants will respond to various events.
 - **Observers** – for larger exercises with multiple groups it is useful to have some observers. While the exercise facilitator is usually physically with participants during the exercise, they will not be able to monitor all discussions. Having one or two observers present can help ensure that all key decisions and actions are captured for the debrief and post-exercise report. Depending on the exercise, observers could be external or, especially if there are concerns around confidentiality, selected from internal staff members who are not on the CMT. If it is decided not to use observers, it may be useful to video record the exercise to enable the facilitator to review any missed discussions or key decisions after the exercise.

2.3 Scenario development

Getting the scenario right is one of the most important aspects when preparing an exercise. However, developing a realistic and challenging scenario can be a daunting process, particularly for larger exercises. Not all scenarios make good exercises, and it is easy to get carried away, and to try to cram everything into the scenario, making it unworkable. As the scenario is central to the exercise, it is important to make sure that the planned storyline and each new 'inject' introduced are plausible and will enable the exercise to successfully meet its objectives. Exercise inputs, also known as injects or serials, are used to provide additional information and support the developing scenario. An inject is any event, situation or update that is presented to the participants to elicit specific responses, such as triggering an action or decision. Injects can be shared with all or only some of the participants. As each inject is developed, it is important to define what actions or decision you expect participants to take in response.

Each time new situations are introduced into the scenario, participants need time to process the information, understand what has happened, make sense of the facts and implications, decide, and then execute the task. This tends to be slow at the beginning but usually speeds up as the exercise develops. Try to balance the complexity of the scenario and frequency of the various interactions or activities. Speeding up or slowing down the time interval between injects allows you to build or reduce pressure depending on what is needed.



Developing scenarios

- **Identify key stages** – break down the overall scenario into smaller situations. Evaluate the potential impact of each situation and decide which are ‘major’ or ‘minor’. Determine which situations to include in your exercise, and try to include a mixture of major and minor situations.
- **Build storyboard** – chosen situations should be linked within a basic story or narrative arc; exposition, inciting incident, raising action, crisis, climax, falling action, and resolution.
- **Determine interactions** – for each situation identify the potential interactions and activities involved.
- **Develop a simple timeline** – try to determine how long participants would need for each situation.
- **Ensure injects involve different functions** – all members of the CMT should be engaged, and have the opportunity to explore their specific roles and responsibilities.
- **Use new situations sparingly** – introducing new situations too often can become overwhelming and create frustration, so only introduce what is required to meet the exercise objectives.
- **Limit use of time jumps** – although some scenarios will require time jumps to explore different stages in the management of the incident, they can create confusion and so should be used in moderation.
- **Add characters** – once you have your basic storyboard, start adding characters and other details to the scenario. Choice of characters is influenced by the location of the incident, and the organization’s presence in those locations. Characters tend to include those who have a role and those who are directly impacted by the incident. To add to the realism, it may be useful to refer to actual people based in those locations, but of course it is important to use fake names for any individuals who are directly affected by the incident.
- **Balance profiles** – when including characters into the scenario try to incorporate a mix of genders, ethnicities and nationalities.
- **Provide background information** – where possible, provide additional background on key characters, as this helps the role players create more credible and realistic interactions.
- **Consider the ending** – although the incident may not be closed and further actions may be required, try to avoid having major situations left unresolved at the end of the exercise.

You must be prepared to adapt or create new injects during the exercise. Prepare extra injects that can be used to help guide participants or provide additional challenges depending on their progress – they do not have to be used if they are not needed.

The way that injects are delivered to participants has a significant impact on the realism of the exercise, so think creatively, depending on technology and resources available. For example, an inject could be by email, text message or WhatsApp, a social media posting, news article, phone call or something delivered in person by a role player or the facilitator acting out a role. Factoring in realistic delivery methods creates a more interesting and engaging exercise for the participants.

2.4 Timetable and supporting documents

The exercise timetable details the sequence of events from the start to the end of the exercise, including the timing and delivery of each event or inject. The exercise timetable lists injects in chronological order and includes information such as:

- **Inject number.**
- **Timing of each inject.** Times are based on rough estimates as an inject may be delayed or brought forward depending on participant progress.
- **Summary of the inject content.**
- **Means of communication, such as email, phone call, social media post or news coverage.**
- **Intended recipient.** Avoid sending all messages via the same person; vary it to check information flow within the CMT.
- **Person responsible for its delivery.**
- **Expected outcomes or reactions.**
- **Any additional comments or information for the exercise team.**

The type and size of the exercise will influence what supporting documentation and background information is required. The following should be considered:

- **Exercise instructions** – these are provided to participants in advance and include an overview, joining instructions and any pre-reading required, such as existing plans or general crisis management guidance.
- **Existing crisis plans** – where crisis management plans and procedures exist, these should be shared with participants before the exercise to allow them to familiarize themselves with the documents. Hard copies should also be available during the exercise.
- **Crisis logs** – decision and comms log templates to record all key decisions and actions taken, and all incoming and outgoing communications related to the incident.
- **Contact lists** – participants must know who they can and cannot contact during the exercise and be made aware of any constraints on their interactions with external stakeholders.
- **Staff profiles** – staff lists for the different locations involved in the exercise, including fictitious staff used in the scenarios. Staff profiles should include nationality, emergency and next of kin contacts, and key medical information.
- **Country guides** – background information on the countries and locations used in the exercise scenario.
- **Situation reports** – additional reference material and reports on the security situation in country from governments, UN/INGO/LNNGOs, or local and international news articles.
- **Maps** – detailed maps of the country and specific areas referenced in the exercise scenario.

All documentation should be clearly marked as ‘exercise material only’.

2.5 Venue and room setup

For in-person exercises, a suitable venue to run the exercise is essential. Options will depend on the facilities available in the organization. Ideally there should be sufficient space for the participants to move around and engage in small group discussions. If space is limited, try to identify nearby break out rooms that can be used.

Using the same room that would be used by the organization to manage a real crisis will add to the sense of realism, and will enable participants to become more familiar with using the information displays and equipment that they would have access to during an actual crisis response.

To ensure the exercise runs smoothly, the room should be set up with the following:

- **Large table** for participants to meet and agree actions, plus **smaller tables** to enable specific functions to work on separate tasks.
- **Audio visual equipment** for exercise presentations and video injects.
- **Video conferencing equipment** for online meetings and interactions with stakeholders, including regional and country teams, if involved. Equipment must be sufficiently tested beforehand.
- **Phone and email access** for participants to liaise with exercise management team, and other key stakeholders. If possible, have participants and role players use email addresses created specifically for the exercise, as this enables the facilitator and observers to monitor and review email communications.
- **Information displays** including whiteboards and flip charts to enable participants to capture and visualize essential information.
- **Plenty of beverages and snacks** to ensure participants can remain in the room and work effectively for the duration of the exercise.

Even with an exercise, it is important that privacy is maintained. Make sure that information displays are not visible to others in the building and that conversations cannot be easily overheard.

Depending on the exercise type, a separate room (Exercise Control) for the exercise management team may be required. This should be close to the participants' room to enable the easy movement of observers and role players, and large enough for people to come and go during the exercise and for role players not to disturb each other when on the phone. The Exercise Control room should also be equipped with a large table, whiteboards, and sufficient means of communications (both landlines and mobiles).

3

Delivering the exercise

While good design and thorough preparation are vitally important, once the exercise starts, you enter a dynamic and unpredictable situation, and not everything will go as planned. Key to keeping things on track are effective briefings and good facilitation, while closely observing and monitoring participants' performance.

3.1 Pre-exercise briefings

Before the exercise starts, participants must be well briefed to ensure everyone has a clear understanding of the exercise, how it will work, and their respective roles. Pre-exercise briefings should focus on:

- **Aim and objectives** – outline the overall aim and objectives of the exercise and key expectations.
- **Roles** – clarify the different roles of participants, the exercise management team, and any other stakeholders involved.
- **Format and process** – describe the exercise format, the key stages involved and how it will be facilitated.
- **Ground rules** – discuss expectations and establish ground rules that ensure maximum participation from and respect for everyone present.
- **Communication** – explain how participants will communicate with each other, external stakeholders and the exercise management team, and highlight any constraints or limitations with regards to exercise communications.
- **Observation and debrief** – make clear how the exercise will be observed and recorded, and what will be the focus of the debrief.
- **Admin and logistics** – point out key timings, including breaks and the exercise end time, and explain the room setup and catering arrangements.
- **Emergencies** – clarify how CMT members can be contacted and what will happen to the exercise if a real emergency occurs during the exercise.

The briefing should also factor in time for questions to ensure all participants are clear on how to participate. Prior to the briefing it may be useful to have a member of the senior management team welcome participants, to briefly explain the rationale for the exercise and the wider context of crisis management within the organization.



Establishing ground rules

- **Take it seriously** – even though it is an exercise around a fictitious scenario, the more fully and seriously participants engage, the greater the benefits.
- **Be present** – it is important to be focused on the exercise, so where possible delegate responsibilities to other colleagues and avoid checking emails or taking phone calls during the exercise.
- **It is not a test** – the focus is on the learning experience and the opportunity to make mistakes in a controlled environment; nobody is being judged or graded on their performance.
- **Use existing plans and procedures as guidance** – the exercise is designed to test existing plans and procedures and to highlight where gaps exist.
- **Not everyone is always involved** – as in a real crisis, not all participants will be busy all the time during the exercise. It is important to remain involved and use quieter times to review progress and identify potential issues missed by others.

continued



Establishing ground rules continued

- **All ideas and inputs welcome** – encourage everyone to participate and value the input from and different views raised by other participants.
- **No finger pointing** – keep things constructive; where you disagree, respectfully challenge other participants' views and ideas, but not the person.
- **Exercise adjustments** – aspects of the scenario may be adjusted at various points to adapt to participants' progress and the needs of the exercise.
- **Parking lot** – park issues for review and further discussion later if agreements or decisions cannot be reached within a reasonable amount of time during the exercise.

For larger exercises, the exercise management team will need a separate briefing to ensure they understand the scenario and how it will unfold, and their specific roles. Exercise team briefings usually focus on the exercise plan, highlighting communications, specific roles and responsibilities of the different team members, a quick summary of the scenario and expected responses, and actions to take in the event of unforeseen circumstances.

3.2 Starting the exercise

Exercises can start in many ways, but note that how the exercise begins can affect how participants perceive it and how seriously they take it. Discussion-based exercises usually begin with a presentation to introduce the subject to participants. For simulation-based exercises, focus is on an initial piece of information given to participants to set the scene and kick-start the exercise. The opening information or inject could take many forms, for example a phone call, a text message or email, an update from colleagues in a country office, or social media post.

Ideally, how and to whom this initial information is delivered should mirror as closely as possible the reality of incident reporting in the organization. For example, having a role player report an incident via the organization's emergency out-of-hours number, or emailing someone outside of the CMT, may highlight how effective systems are in escalating incident reports to senior management. However, consider what the CMT will be doing in the meantime. If the exercise is announced in advance, while participants are gathered in the same room you will need to create an artificial task for them to be working on until the incident is reported, such as reviewing the crisis management plan or discussing a fictional scenario.

In situations where the exercise is not announced in advance, or where initial injects are issued to staff outside of the participant group, all phone calls and messages must clearly specify that this is part of an exercise.

3.3 Exercise facilitation

Once the exercise is underway, focus shifts to coordinating the various injects and observing participants' discussions and interactions. However, as simulation exercises are designed to allow participants significant freedom in their decisions and actions, they remain unpredictable. The facilitator's principal role during the exercise is to ensure that participants remain focused, and the objectives of the exercise are met.

The exercise timetable sets the pace of the exercise, based on the timing of the various injects. The pace is often fast to start with in order to immerse participants, and then slowed down to help them become familiar with the situation and allow them time to reach a decision or carry out actions. However, the timetable is only a guide, and you may have to adjust timings in response to participants' reactions, to allow them more time to explore specific issues. There will be periods when you need

to slow things down by delaying injects, or cancelling them, or to speed things up by releasing injects earlier or changing their running order.

Remember that the perception of time for participants will be very different compared to that of the exercise team. Even if you feel that injects are reasonably spaced, with adequate time to discuss and reach a decision, the perception of participants may be that they are being bombarded with injects with no time to consider them – you need to find the right balance.

In addition to adjusting the timing of injects, you may find you also need to introduce new injects during the exercise, for example to address an issue that you did not anticipate, to close down an issue that participants have spent too long focusing on, or to remind them of something they have forgotten. New injects should be used sparingly as they can affect timelines and create confusion for the exercise team.

Breaks are another tool that can be used to manage exercises and keep things on track. Breaks are generally perceived to be disruptive during simulation exercises, as they take participants out of the exercise. However, at times a short break can be useful to debrief participants, while during longer exercises, or if participants appear to be struggling, taking a moment to pause, recap and highlight next steps can help participants regain focus.

3.4 Observing and monitoring performance

A key function of the facilitator during the exercise is to observe how participants are interacting and to capture examples of the various actions, decisions and challenges faced by participants to feedback in the debrief and exercise report. This is not as easy as it sounds, as observing and making effective notes is difficult with so many things going on during the exercise, such as tracking the various injects.

If you can use observers to assist with the exercise, it is useful to prepare a structured observation sheet or checklist to guide them on the specific actions and decisions they should be looking for, with space for recording examples of good practice or areas that need improvement. When observers are in the room, they should position themselves so that they can hear the various discussions but they must understand that their participation is passive, and must not interfere with the management of the exercise or participant performance.



Monitoring exercise performance

- **Leadership and coordination** – evidence of strong leadership and direction, and the effective coordination of multiple structures involved in the response.
- **Teamwork and participation** – clear understanding of roles, adaptability and resilience demonstrated under stress, support and respect shown to colleagues, and the active involvement of all participants.
- **Analysis and decision-making** – appropriate decisions taken based on comprehensive understanding of the context, risks, implications, and available response options.
- **Response actions and task execution** – thorough plan of action, effective delegation of tasks, and the regular review and adjustment of actions in response to new developments.
- **Stakeholder identification and engagement** – comprehensive identification of all stakeholders, proactive interaction with clear leads and communication channels, based on effective engagement strategies.
- **Communication** – effective management of both internal and external communications, with active media monitoring and proactive responses, based on well-thought-out communication strategies.
- **Information management** – efficient use of logs and information displays, and all information pertaining to incident appropriately collated, recorded and stored.



3.5 Dealing with challenging behaviors

Exercises, like real-life crisis events, can be stressful for those involved; as a result they can exaggerate behavioral biases amongst participants. Challenging behaviors can manifest in several ways, for example, participants may be dismissive of the exercise, become overwhelmed by the situation and their responsibilities, dominate discussions or refuse to delegate tasks. In extreme cases, a participant may be very disruptive and actively work against the objectives of the exercise.

As the facilitator it important that you are able to identify and monitor such behaviors, with the help of the observers if available, and that you act early to prevent individuals from negatively impacting the exercise for other participants.

| Tackling common behaviors | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type | Illustration | Solutions |
| Detachment or dismissiveness | Passive attitude, lack of interest, <i>"this would not happen in real life"</i> . | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the individual to immerse themselves in the exercise. • Consider creating additional injects that require actions from them specifically. |
| Overwhelmed | Moving around the room a lot and much gesturing, asking many questions, struggling to comprehend the situation or tasks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure the individual, remind them that the exercise is not intended to evaluate anyone. • Assist them in identifying the key priorities at this stage. |
| Delay or inertia | Lack of focus on exercise or tasks, perception that there is no rush, <i>"it's only an exercise"</i> . | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind participants of the time frame. • Add deadlines to injects to create momentum. |
| Dominating | Occupies central position in the room, dominates discussions, interrupts others. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure other participants are more involved. • Explicitly ask for updates and inputs from other participants to bring them into the exercise. |
| Excessive control | Takes charge of most tasks, lack of delegation, makes decisions without waiting to consider options. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind participants of the need to delegate tasks and engage all team members. • Direct specific tasks to other participants. |
| Lack of leadership | Perpetual discussions, few or no decisions, excessive request for more information, lack of strategic direction. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat the exercise priorities. • Encourage CMT lead to take a more active role. • Introduce inject requesting an update for senior manager/board of trustees (role player) who then challenges the progress achieved so far. |
| Distracted | Responding to non-exercise emails and calls, keeps leaving the room, distracted by external issues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind participants of the need to engage with the exercise. • Talk to the individual to understand the external events and their priority. • Direct injects to the individual that require actions from them specifically. |
| Disruptive | Overtly frustrated with exercise, continually dismissive of scenario or actions taken, undermines or acts aggressively towards other participants. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage CMT lead to tackle any disruptive behavior. • Pull the individual aside and highlight their impact on the experience for other participants. • If behavior continues, ask them to sit out the exercise so as not to jeopardise the exercise or to ruin the experience for other participants. |



3.6 Ending the exercise

Just as it is important that the exercise is launched properly, it is equally important that the exercise closes in a controlled fashion, with all participants understanding that objectives have been met. CMEs are stressful situations, and participants are often emotionally invested in and affected by the scenario which to some extent resembles a real-life situation. It is therefore recommended that the exercise concludes with a final event that helps to 'close the loop'. For instance, an inject or an announcement should clearly state that the situation is resolved or normalized.

The decision to end the exercise should be made by the facilitator in consultation with other key exercise staff. As soon as you end the exercise, participants will want to take a break so make sure this is factored into the agenda. It is important that participants understand that although the scenario activity has ceased, the exercise has not ended: remind them that after the break further discussions and debriefs will be undertaken.

3.7 Debriefing

As soon as the exercise ends everyone involved – participants and the exercise team – should participate in a debrief. The focus of this debrief is to give participants the opportunity to share feedback on the exercise and how they felt they performed in it, and for the exercise team to share observations. Even if you plan to provide a written report after the exercise, factoring time into the agenda for a verbal debriefing is vitally important because it provides immediate feedback to participants while things are fresh and at the forefront of people's minds.

As the facilitator, you should lead the debrief and draw out key achievements, particular gaps or challenges, and any immediate recommendations. If an exercise involves many participants, it may be useful to put people into smaller groups, and then for each group to share their findings in plenary at the end.

Conducting a debrief

- **Allow enough time** – ensure sufficient time is allocated on the agenda to debrief properly, but don't drag it on too long as energy and concentration levels will be low at the end of the day.
- **Involve participants and observers** – debriefs should include all participants, the facilitator, and any observers.
- **Let participants speak first** – participants should be given the opportunity to share their views first to prevent observers from influencing their feedback. Use the 3x3x3 feedback rule: Identify three things that worked well during the exercise, three things you learned from your role, and three things that need to be improved.
- **Highlight both positives and negatives** – to avoid focusing only on mistakes, balance references to both positive performance and aspects that require improvement.
- **Focus on team performances** – crisis management is very much a team response, so avoid singling out any individuals or functions for criticism.
- **Use logs and information displays** – draw participants' attention to any positive use of crisis logs and information displays, highlighting particular examples of good practice.
- **Highlight the support available** – exercises by their design are stressful events and they can trigger emotional reactions due to previous experiences or the subjects being discussed. It is important to identify and make available appropriate support for participants if they wish to talk to someone afterwards.
- **Finish on a positive** – wrap up the debrief by focusing on the positive learnings or takeaways from the exercise, and thank everyone for their active participation.

To wrap up the debrief, and to draw a close to the overall exercise, you should look to end on a positive note, highlighting the key takeaways or learnings from the exercise. It is also useful to refer to the exercise objectives discussed at the start and reflect on how these have been achieved. It may be useful to have a member of the senior management team acknowledge the value of the exercise and highlight any steps to address the feedback or observations raised.

4

Learning from the exercise

The final stage of organizing an exercise is to consolidate findings and recommendations in a post-exercise report and collect feedback from all those involved to improve future exercises.

4.1 Post-exercise report

Following any exercise, a report should be prepared to capture the learning from the exercise along with recommendations and actions required to improve the organization's crisis management system. Even discussion-based exercises should include a post-exercise report, although the level of detail will be less than with a full-scale simulation exercise. The report will have several audiences, for example a summary will be of interest to senior management and the board, whereas a more comprehensive document will be circulated to CMT members.

When preparing a post-exercise report, you should include the following:

- **Aim and objectives** – include key details such as the date, location, participants, and exercise management team.
- **Exercise objectives** – outline the focus and objectives of the exercise.
- **Exercise format** – specify the approach taken and why.
- **Scenario summary** – describe the scenario theme and provide a chronological summary of the main events.
- **Exercise findings and observations** – summarize the main findings from the exercise, highlighting both examples of good practice and areas that require improvement.
- **Recommendations** – provide a set of clear recommendations to strengthen the organization's crisis management capabilities.

Exercise reports aim to effect change and bring about improvement. Therefore, the report should also propose the functions responsible for leading on the various recommendations, and a timeframe for when each measure should be implemented.



TOOLS & RESOURCES: Tool 4 – Exercise Report Template

4.2 Evaluation and follow-up

The purpose of the exercise evaluation is to gather feedback on the exercise design and facilitation from both participants and members of the exercise team. The evaluation can be conducted through a mixture of confidential questionnaires and post-exercise interviews.

It is helpful to develop a standard evaluation form that can be issued to participants at the end of the exercise or through an online survey. Evaluations usually ask participants to rate different aspects of the exercise, such as initial information provided, the briefing and materials, the facilitation, the scenario, and the debrief. It is useful to also include open sections to allow participants to make specific comments about the exercise. Ideally, participant evaluations should be completed while it is still fresh in people's minds, but realistically at the end of a long day, responses might be limited.

It is important to also solicit feedback from the exercise team, in particular the role players and observers. Rather than using a standard evaluation form, it is often easiest to approach them directly,

either by asking them to respond to a few simple questions, or by conducting interviews, or a mixture of both.

Materials used in the exercise should be archived and added to a resource bank to be used in future exercises. Finally, it is critical to share and promote best practice learned and/or observed while facilitating exercises that can benefit others planning to run similar exercises in the future. Documenting your experiences and sharing lessons and resources through peer networking groups such as **GISF** and **OSAC** is a valuable way to build the collective knowledge of the sector.

CMEs must not be seen as ‘tick the box’ activities which, once completed, means the organization is now crisis prepared. Regular exercises are integral to maintaining a consistent level of preparedness across the organization. In addition, the high turnover of senior staff in many organizations means that running regular exercises will ensure that all CMT members understand their roles and responsibilities and feel prepared to carry out these responsibilities under high levels of stress.

A key part of the follow-up to an exercise is to agree when the next exercise should take place, and depending on the gaps identified, what the next CME should focus on. Organizing CMEs, at least annually, to learn from previous exercises, improve response measures, and test future scenarios, will help to raise the awareness, skills, and confidence of CMT members, and ensure that the organization remains adequately prepared to manage critical incidents whenever they occur.



TOOLS & RESOURCES: Tool 5 – Exercise Evaluation Form Template

5

Tools and resources

- **Tool 1**
Exercise Facilitation Checklist
- **Tool 2**
Exercise Plan Template
- **Tool 3**
Exercise Observation Sheet Template
- **Tool 4**
Exercise Report Template
- **Tool 5**
Exercise Evaluation Form Template





Tool 1

Exercise Facilitation Checklist

| 8 Weeks Before Exercise | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Identify potential partner organization/facilitator for peer exchange | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree peer exchange objectives and the specific responsibilities and deliverables for both parties | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Clarify privacy and confidentiality issues and any legal requirements, such as the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Establish Terms of Reference (ToR) or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between both organizations | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 Weeks Before Exercise | |
| Define the aim and objectives of the exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Confirm date and timings, and inform potential participants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Establish small exercise planning group to support the facilitator in designing the exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Weeks Before Exercise | |
| Develop a profile of the host organization – mission, values, operational footprint, risks, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Clarify the host organization’s existing structures and responsibilities for dealing with critical incidents | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Identify and map likely interactions and information flows within the host organization during a crisis | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Identify and agree exercise participants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Identify any other stakeholders required to participate in the exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Determine the format and overall theme of the exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Identify specific resource requirements – ICT, room layouts, admin support, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Weeks Before Exercise | |
| Develop an exercise plan – dates and timings, aim and objectives, scope and format, participants and exercise team, and admin details | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Finalize composition of facilitation team – role players, exercise support and observers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Develop or adapt the incident scenario and injects | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Determine how the exercise will start and end | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prepare exercise timetable and supporting documents | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 Week Before Exercise | |
| Distribute background information and pre-exercise reading materials to participants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Print crisis plans and other key exercise documents to be available during the exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 Day Before Exercise | |
| Set up room and information displays, and test any equipment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Brief exercise facilitation team on the scenario and their specific roles | <input type="checkbox"/> |

continued

Tool 1 – Exercise Facilitation Checklist *continued*

| During the Exercise | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Provide pre-exercise briefings to participants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ensure all participants understand the exercise format, how it will be facilitated, and ground rules | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Coordinate and adjust the exercise injects according to the timetable and participants' performance | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Monitor and capture participants' interactions and decisions during the exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Debrief participants at the end of the exercise – key achievements, gaps or challenges, and any immediate recommendations | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| End on a positive note, highlight main takeaways or learnings from the exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Post-exercise | |
| Prepare a post-exercise report – summarize the main findings and recommendations | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gather feedback on the exercise from both participants and facilitation team | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Identify and agree when the next exercise should take place | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Tool 2

Exercise Plan Template

[Insert organization name]

Crisis Management Exercise Plan

Date/location

Date, timing and location

Purpose

The aim of the crisis management exercise is to....

Key Objectives

-
-
-

Exercise theme and format

Outline the overall exercise theme/scenario and the exercise format to be used

Exercise management team

List the exercise team and their specific roles

Participants

Identify all the participants

Other stakeholders

List any others involved in the exercise and their roles

Exercise control

Outline how the exercise will function, exercise start and other key stages, means of communication and other ICT requirements, and the observation and debriefing process

Administration

Explain the room setup, resource requirements, and catering arrangements



Tool 3 Exercise Observation Sheet Template

[Insert organization name]

Crisis Management Exercise Observation Sheet

| Date/location: | Observer: |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| | |
| Leadership and coordination | |
| | |
| Teamwork and participation | |
| | |
| Analysis and decision-making | |
| | |
| Response actions and task execution | |
| | |
| Stakeholder identification and engagement | |
| | |
| Communication | |
| | |
| Information management | |
| | |
| Additional comments | |
| | |



Tool 4 Exercise Report Template

[Insert organization name]

Crisis Management Exercise Report

Date/location:

Facilitator(s):

Participants:

Exercise overview

Outline the approach taken and why, and the aim and objectives of the exercise

Key Objectives

-
-
-

Scenario summary

Describe the scenario theme and provide a chronological summary of the main events

Exercise finding and observations

Summarize the main findings from the exercise, highlighting both examples of good practice and areas that require improvement

Recommendations

List recommendations to strengthen the organization's crisis management capabilities



Tool 5

Exercise Evaluation Form Template

[Insert organization name]

Crisis Management Exercise Evaluation Form

Please complete and return this form at the end of the exercise.

| Date: | Location: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|----------------|--|----------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Please rate the exercise relative to the following statements, with 1 indicating that you strongly disagree and 5 that you strongly agree.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;">Strongly disagree</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: left;">Strongly agree</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> </tr> </table> | Strongly disagree | | | | | Strongly agree | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Strongly disagree | | | | | Strongly agree | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | | | | | |
| • The exercise achieved its aim and objectives. | 1 2 3 4 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • The pre-exercise information and briefing was useful. | 1 2 3 4 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • The exercise felt plausible and relevant to my organization. | 1 2 3 4 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • The level of participation was appropriate for my role. | 1 2 3 4 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • The facilitator was knowledgeable and kept things on track. | 1 2 3 4 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| • The exercise debrief was comprehensive and identified areas that we can improve. | 1 2 3 4 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>1) Which aspects of the exercise were most useful for you?</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>2) List three actions you will take forward in relation to your role and responsibilities</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>3) What improvements/changes would you suggest for future exercises?</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>4) Please provide any other comments/suggestions</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this form.



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