Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate
Public Governance Committee

Leadership during Crisis

Meeting of Senior Officials from Centres of Government: Leadership in Managing Risk

Vienna, 28-29 September 2006

This document provides background information for Session 4 on Thursday 28 September from 16:30 p.m. to 18:00 p.m.

For more information, please contact Christian VERGEZ, at christian.vergez@oecd.org or + 33 1 45 24 90 44.
# Session 4
## Leadership during crisis

### Key issues

1. **Key challenges of crisis leadership**
   - Leading the way out of a crisis:
     - Leadership, public expectations and trust
     - Five critical tasks for leaders: sense making, decision making, meaning making, terminating and learning

2. **Recognising and managing a crisis**
   - History will judge: foresight, ingenuity and integrity
     - Crisis? What crisis? Organisational and cognitive barriers to crisis recognition
     - Deciding to act: information overload and decision paralysis
     - Who is in charge? Coordinating crisis response (government, businesses, civil society)
     - Ensuring flexibility without undermining accountability and transparency

3. **Effective leadership and communication**
   - Maintaining public trust
     - What is happening? The role of leaders in framing a crisis
     - Credibility in crisis communication: role of reputation, professionalism, clarity, rapidity
     - Who was to blame? Ending a crisis and ensuring accountability

### Questions for discussion

- How do CoGs provide leadership in crises? How do they ensure that all stakeholders, private sector partners and government units are clear about their roles and responsibilities during a crisis?
- What are the characteristics and components of a good team for handling a crisis at the Centre of Government?
- What is the respective role of political leaders and senior civil servants in managing crises?
- How do CoGs ensure effective public communication by leaders during crises?
- How can Centres of Government ensure international coordination to detect rapidly escalating crises, avoid under- and over-response and limit spill-over effects on other countries?
- How can international crisis coordination be improved?
### Five key tasks of crisis leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sense making</td>
<td>Ensuring that policy makers understand what is going on and what might happen next</td>
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<tr>
<td>decision making</td>
<td>Shaping overall direction and coherence of collective efforts to respond to the crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>meaning making</td>
<td>Actively framing public understanding of the crisis to ensure that collective efforts to manage the crisis are enhanced</td>
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<tr>
<td>terminating</td>
<td>Accounting for actions taken and bringing crisis to closure</td>
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<tr>
<td>learning</td>
<td>Drawing lessons and grasping opportunities to repair or reform</td>
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### Protecting the rule of law during a crisis: checks & balances

- Time limits
- Internal supervision
- Hierarchical supervision
- Instant independent supervision
- Approval from above
- Informing the public
- Review
- Documentation
- Indictment

Source: based on Swedish Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) (2005), p. 37

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### Paradoxes of crisis communication

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<tr>
<th>Paradox</th>
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<tr>
<td>Calming/warning paradox</td>
<td>Convincing people that the risks are small while simultaneously preparing them for the worst</td>
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<td>Target group adaptation paradox</td>
<td>Tailoring information to specific groups’ needs may be most effective but lead to credibility problems if perceived as ‘mixed messages’</td>
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<td>Information culture paradox</td>
<td>An organisational culture of secrecy may face challenges when obliged to cooperate &amp; communicate with more decentralised and open organisations.</td>
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<td>Information requirement paradox</td>
<td>Complete disinterest may give way, instantly, to huge demands for information.</td>
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<td>Credibility/vigilance paradox</td>
<td>Over-reliance on highly credible authorities may dampen public readiness.</td>
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