

Chapter 6: MDT Coordinator

The MDT Coordinator

To ensure optimal functioning, the MDT must be skillfully managed.ⁱ For most MDTs, this person is referred to as the MDT Coordinator. For some MDTs, this person has a dual role of MDT Coordinator and agency representative; for others, an individual is hired solely for the purpose of managing the MDT and its many functionsⁱⁱ. To increase accountability, it is preferable to hire a full-time person for this position rather than solicit a volunteer from the MDT,ⁱⁱⁱ but realistically, this option is unavailable for many communities.

If you are hiring an MDT Coordinator, the MDT will want to think strategically about the vision the MDT holds for the MDT Coordinator. The MDT Coordinator has tremendous responsibility for administrative aspects of the MDT, such as arranging meetings, gathering and coordinating victim information, facilitating discussions, recording decisions, providing case follow up and tracking, and managing data collection.^{iv} The MDT coordinator also plays a nearly invisible yet crucial role in melding the disparate MDT members into a cohesive team and maintaining team cohesion as the team matures over time.

Transformation of the MDT Members into a Cohesive Team

The MDT Coordinator must have a strong understanding of group dynamics to facilitate the transformation of a diverse set of professionals into a cohesive team (Cross et al., 2012; Sheppard & Zangrillo, 1996). As discussed, typically MDT members do not start out as a team, but over time these disparate members become something greater than the sum of their individual parts (Blowers et al., 2012; D'Amour et al., 2005; Hallet & Stevenson, 1980; Swallow et al., 2014). This transformation requires strong leadership (Disis & Slattery, 2010; Kearney & Gebert, 2009).

The MDT Coordinator must minimize and/or shift attention away from differences among team members to the commonalities and shared goals by pooling perspectives (Kearney & Gebert, 2009). The MDT Coordinator must manage expertise diversity and the inherent power differentials (Bell, 2001; D'Amour et al., 2005; Levi, 2014) and instill a collective team identification defined as “the emotional significance that team members of a given group attach to their membership in that group” (Van der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005). This transformation is critical because teams that avoid domination by a single viewpoint will be more successful (Desis & Slattery, 2010; Levi, 2014). In addition, MDTs require committed members who know their position, know their responsibility, and know and trust their teammates (Feng et al., 2010), each of which is aided by a skilled MDT Coordinator.

This transformation takes time. Many teams are not as effective in the beginning as they will eventually become. However, team building can be facilitated by socializing new members, identifying team goals, and developing rules of operation (Levi, 2014).

The MDT Coordinator’s Responsibilities

Good coordination by a skilled MDT Coordinator can overcome many barriers associated with an MDT.^v Therefore, the MDT may want to discuss and/or write a position description for the MDT Coordinator position. The following is a list of some activities your MDT might want to consider designating as the MDT Coordinator’s responsibility:^{vi}

- **Prior to Meetings**

- Manages case intake procedres including: reviews, approves, and prioritizes case summaries submitted for presentation (de-identifies parties before the meeting if needed)
- Provides assistance in preparing members who will be presenting a case by explaining what the presenter should expect in the meeting and helping the presenter frame the case, concerns, and requests for assistance from other team members.
- Sends out MDT meeting reminders and agendas

- **At the Meetings**

- Sets up the meeting room:
 - Arranges sign-in sheet/confidentiality agreement, copies of case summaries, name cards, and any other community information
 - Coordinates food and drink
- Sits at the head of the table in order to best facilitate the meeting
- Facilitates introductions and agency announcements
- Reviews the confidentiality agreement
- Reviews discussion ground rules (i.e. raising hand to be called on to speak, no shame-no blame)
- Directs group discussion toward the presenter's questions by ensuring that all (or most) MDT members contribute to the discussion
- Checks in with the presenter at the end of the discussion as to whether he/she received the assistance needed
- Responds to previously raised issues where follow-up was requested
- Notes issues raised at MDT meetings that need follow-up
- Records meeting minutes using the MDT Data Collection Form (if any)
- Manages conflict and interpersonal dynamics
- Recasts a team error into an opportunity for learning
- Is responsible for enacting confidentiality procedures (e.g. collecting and shredding documents at the end of the meeting, enforcing note taking protocols, etc.)

“When teams are successful, team members view success as caused by the team; when they are unsuccessful, they tend to blame individual members for failure.” (Levi, 2014)

- **After the Meetings**
 - Engages in follow-up and ensures MDT members are honoring their promises
 - Oversees data entry and data tracking activities
 - Manages case follow-up calendar (as many cases are presented at the MDT meeting on multiple occasions, either for additional consultation or for outcome reporting).

- **Outside of Meetings**
 - Reviews and purges the MDT Meeting Reminder e-mail list periodically
 - Arranges trainings (often short 30 minute trainings built into MDT meetings)
 - Arranges new-member orientation
 - Presents information about the role and function of the MDT to the wider community
 - Represents the MDT at community meetings and events

The MDT Coordinator’s Leadership Qualities

Many MDT Coordinators lead using democratic principles as they typically have no authority other than that imparted to them by the MDT. Therefore, their task is to create the conditions that allow the team to function effectively and achieve its goals.^{vii} Consider which qualities are important when selecting and/or hiring the MDT Coordinator, such as:^{viii}

- **Transformational Leadership Skills**
Possesses (or has the capacity to possess) the ability to develop a team culture^{ix} by aligning team members’ goals and values and to foster a collective team identification.^x

- **Equalize Participation**
Manages the group process to ensure all members of the MDT participate and communicate equally.
- **Neutrality**
Perceived by all team members as neutral.
- **Credibility**
Has the clout to influence agency administrators.
- **Time**
Has the time to commit to developing and running the MDT.
- **Recruitment**
Has the ability to recruit new MDT members from a variety of agencies.
- **Facilitation Skills**
Possesses the skills to work with a variety of individuals, to unify the team, move the team to a group decision,^{xi} and when necessary redirect the team back to the discussion at hand.
- **Confrontation Skills**
Has the ability to confront a team member regarding their responsibility failure.
- **Sense of Humor**
Has a sense of humor which can alleviate stressful situations.

Advice for MDT Coordinators

- **Pose Challenging Tasks**
The goal (task) must be sufficiently engaging and meaningful to MDT members.
- **Identify Individual and Group Performance**
Each individual on the team believes the team needs their distinct expertise and feels responsible for their own work as well as that of the MDT (interdependence neutralizes power differentials).
- **Reward Group Success**
Individuals must believe rewards are based on their individual performance as well as the outcomes of the MDT.
- **Engender Commitment to the Team**
Group cohesion is a culmination of MDT members liking the task, enjoy working together, have personal involvement in the task, and take pride in the team's performance. Team success improves team cohesion. Explicitly celebrate the MDT's accomplishments.

Summary. The MDT Coordinator plays a vital role on the MDT. In addition to important administrative functions, the MDT Coordinator has responsibility for transforming a disparate group of individuals into a cohesive team and maintaining that cohesion over time. Therefore, strong leadership qualities are essential.

Endnotes

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