

On Finding “Common Ground” An Exercise for Coordination Initiatives

“There has been a shift from linear thinking (in science) to systems thinking - for example, the shift from seeing things as structures to seeing them as processes. A tree is not an object, but an expression of processes, such as photosynthesis, which connect the sun and the earth. The same is true of our bodies, our jobs, our organizations, and ourselves.”

Belonging to the Universe, Fritz Capra

A coordination initiative (on violence against women) is, like an “organization”, an expression of processes interrelating with one another. A member of a coordination initiative brings not only themselves to the process, but the knowledge, attitudes, values and mandates of their discipline as well. These are likely to be very diverse and if not discussed can block the group from working effectively as a team.

Creating Synergy

All of us at one time or another have been part of a great team. It may have been through sports, in a school play, or perhaps through work. What we remember about these experiences is the trust, the relationships, the comfort and acceptance for an exchange of ideas. This is the “synergy” teams strive to create. Through intentional dialogue, focused on creating a learning environment for everyone involved, a cross-discipline synergy can be created. This can be a powerful force when addressing the many and multiple-layered intersections that affect a woman’s safety.

Balancing Process and Product

As we acknowledge the work of a coordination initiative as a process and method for increasing women’s safety (**the product**), we must acknowledge that how members of the coordination initiative work together (**the process**) is the key ingredient in the quality of the product - how well we improve safety for women.

Finding Common Ground

The following is a process tool for coordination initiatives to use to build “common ground”. Such a process will contribute to a collaboratively built foundation from which synergy can grow. The exercise is designed to help a group develop a set of “beliefs we have in common” from a brainstorm on common assumptions.

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EXERCISE

Finding Common Ground

BRAINSTORM: Each of us has assumptions about violence against women, such as why it happens and what will stop it. Ask the group what their assumptions are and record on flip chart.

OPTION ONE:

Go through each assumption and discuss in large group - find consensus on accepting or rejecting the assumption.

1. If time permits and the group is willing, do two rounds for each of the assumptions (if not, perhaps do one round of both questions):
 - i) The way I understand this assumption is:
 - ii) I would change/eliminate it. Change, how?
2. Edit the accepted assumption - discuss adopting the assumption as “a belief we have in common”

OPTION TWO:

Break the group into smaller groups - have each small group find consensus on accepting or rejecting 3 of the assumptions and present to the large group.

1. Small groups do two rounds for each of the assumptions:
 - i) The way I understand this assumption is:
 - ii) I would change/eliminate it. Change, how?
2. Edit the accepted assumption - discuss adopting the assumption as “a belief we have in common”
3. Report back to larger group - discuss adopting the assumption as “a belief we have in common”

Developing a set of common beliefs is an essential step in a workplan for building a well functioning coordination initiative.