Managing Compatibility Problems:

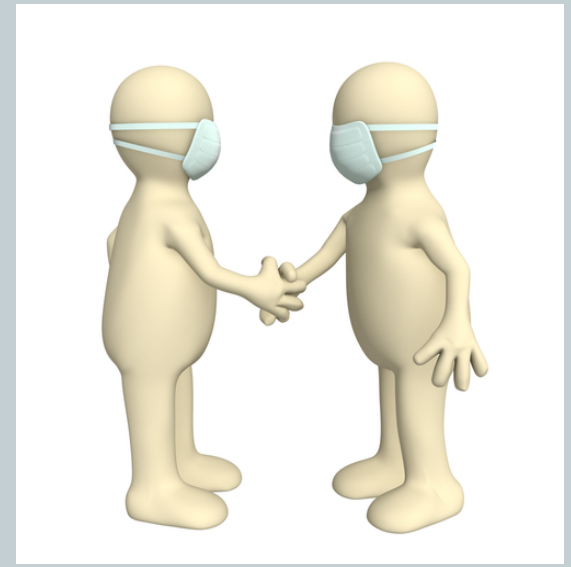## Strengthening Multisectoral Partnerships (MSPs) for EID Response

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MSP Designers Focus on "What", Not "How"

When designing MSPs, members tend to focus mainly on programmatic goals and strategies rather than organizational dynamics. But bringing together members from different sectors, with different cultures & ways of operating, creates "compatibility problems" and tensions within MSPs. If ignored, these organizational tensions will surface during crises, when they are most damaging and MSPs can least afford to deal with them. By recognizing compatibility problems and proactively managing them, members can strengthen MSPs and enhance EID responses.

I investigate compatibility problems in 7 global MSPs via extensive documentary analysis and 50+ interviews with staff from MSPs and public, private, and civil society MSP members. I theorize key organizational tensions and compatibility problems and identify best practices for managing them.

Diagnosing Compatibility Problems

Compatibility problems are rooted in 3 fundamental organizational tensions

Output vs. Input Priorities

Members have a variety of organizational priorities related to outputs (e.g. efficiency, cost effectiveness, added value, ROI, flexibility) and inputs (e.g. multiple forms of accountability, transparency, inclusivity, equity). In practice, these often conflict. But instead of reconciling them, members stack them.

Actor vs. Forum Role

Some members see MSPs as actors with authority to set group agendas and coordinate their members' activities. Others see MSPs as forums in which members share their independent agendas & activities and collaborate where feasible.

Execution vs. Expectations

Members tend to blame poor MSP performance on execution (e.g. org structure, bureaucracy, leadership). They seek org reform before (or instead of) examining the underlying org tensions or inconsistencies between their MSP performance expectations and their own contributions, choices, or willingness to be led.

Managing Compatibility Problems

Approach MSPs like marriages—not like programs, business ventures, or investments

- Don't let the ideal be the enemy of the functional
- For longevity, trust & respect among members are more important than strategies, activities, or KPIs
- Red team regularly
- Structure & governance should follow role (e.g. different decision-making process for actor vs. forum)
- Members must be ready to accept ownership for problems but share credit for successes
- Org change/reform that doesn't frankly address underlying tensions is a superficial waste of resources