

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN
FOR UNITED NATIONS
FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES

Mediating Around the World

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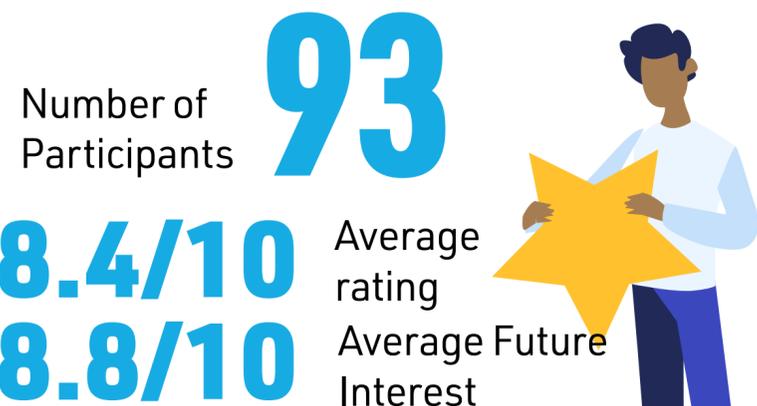
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Mediation Highlights

April - June 2021

The mediation team is pleased to introduce the second edition of "Mediating Around the World"—the mediation newsletter of the Mediation Unit of the Office of the Ombudsman for UN Funds and Programmes. In this edition, we present our achievements throughout the second quarter of 2021 as well as contributions from the members of the International Advisory Board and the Global Mediation Panel mediators. We are also grateful for the contribution of our partners from the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations of UNICEF. Finally, we celebrate our mediation champion of this edition, Zvezdana Mitic, Senior Programme Manager at the Office of Information and Communications Technology at the United Nations, who periodically collaborates with our team by referring workplace issues to our Office for mediation.

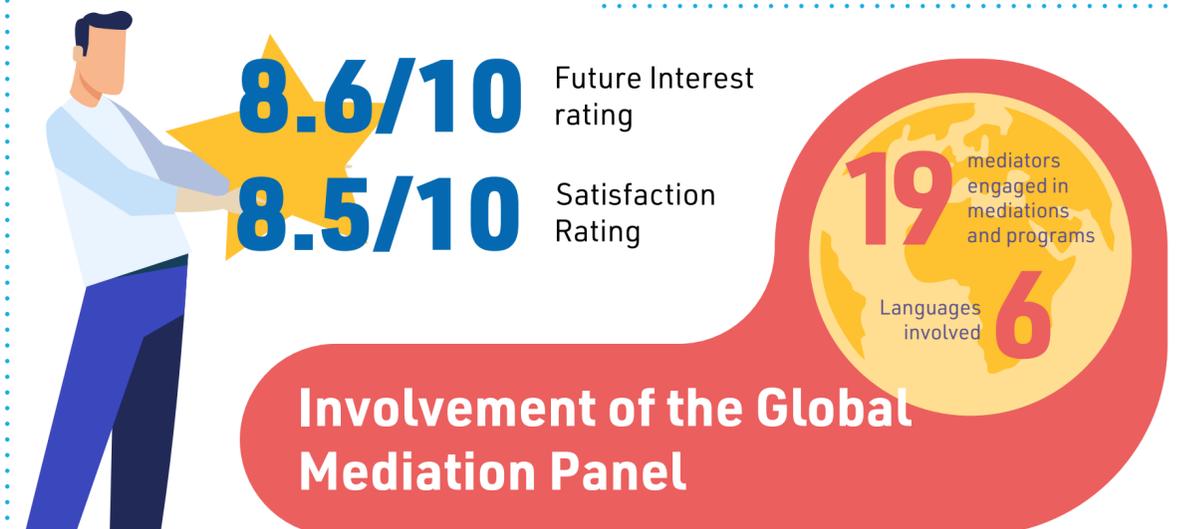
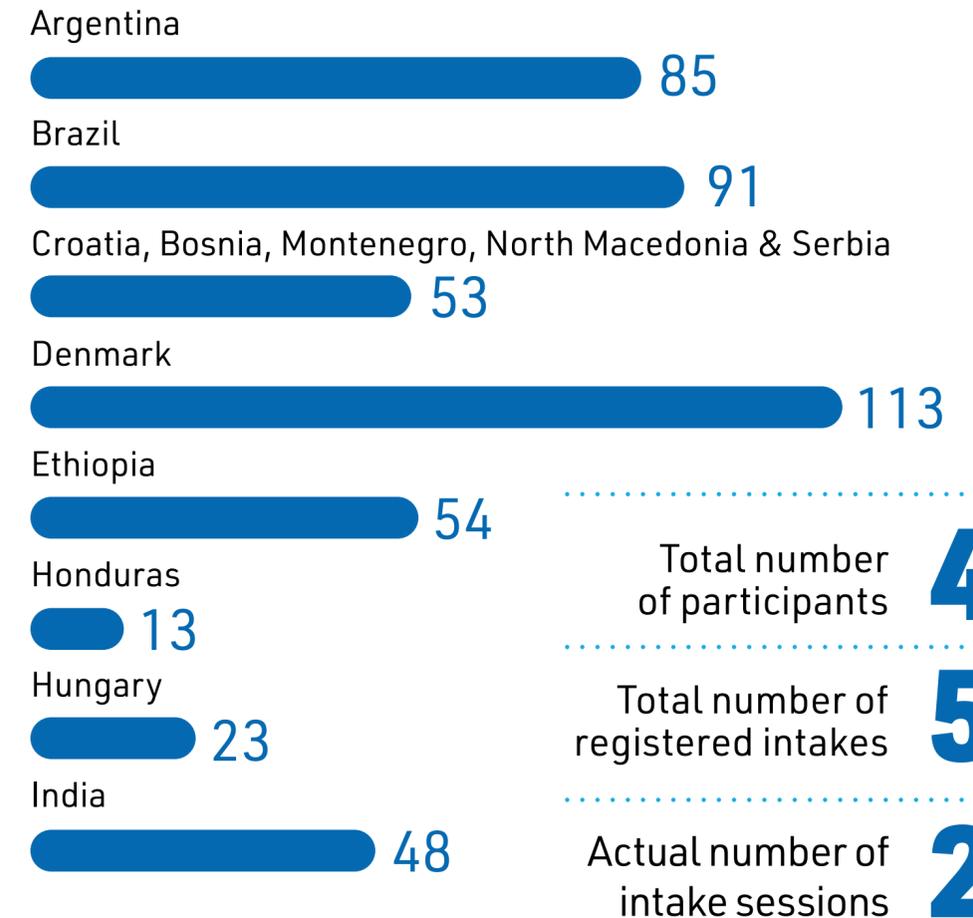
Global Webinar on Arbitration



Global Cross-Agency Webinars on Mediation



Conversation with the Mediator Program



Testimonials from Conversation with the Mediator Program



I found the training to be precise and informative.

Very informative, I would like to learn more on the process and how I can introduce this within my section, if deemed necessary.

Estuvo muy bien, didáctica y ejecutiva.

It was excellent and even fascinating I would say. Well done to the colleagues for their important work

Clear and complete

Very well put together, clear presentation and useful. Thank you very much!

Very few people participated from our office, which is a missed opportunity. I think hosting organizations need to do more preparation to promote this event among their staff.

Thank you, I am glad I attended

Very interesting and interactive

Glad to know the different channels available for managing disagreements.....it was a very insightful session and look forward to future familiarization sessions.

The training and facilitators are great.

Great and engaging presenters, really appreciated the session.

I have worked with 3 different organizations and this training should have been there 20 years ago. I have seen both good and bad managers and workers which could have benefitted from this information.

Its a pity that the turnout was not high as this will benefit all.

Very useful for all colleagues to be aware and make use of this mechanism

thanks for the training, very informative

Good job, great we have access to this method!

This was one very useful event for me. Thank you.

Excellent presentation, thank you!

Latest News and Updates

A Conversation with the Mediator series

We have successfully conducted the program in various country offices. If your office has not participated yet, it could still be a lucky one! Please see below the locations and dates for the remaining sessions:

Country Office	Date	NY time	Local time
Indonesia	Tu, July 6	9:00 PM	8:00 AM
Jordan	Tu, July 27	9:00 AM	4:00 PM
Kenya	Tu, Aug. 3	9:00 AM	4:00 PM
Lebanon/ Egypt	Tu, Aug. 17	9:00 AM	3:00 PM Egypt 4:00:00 PM Lebanon
Madagascar	Thu, Sep. 2	9:00 AM	4:00 PM
Mexico	Tu, Sep. 14	11:00 AM	9:00 AM
Mozambique	Tu, Sep. 28	10:00 AM	4:00 PM
Nigeria	Tu, Oct. 5	10:00 AM	3:00 PM
Senegal	Tu, Oct. 12	10:00 AM	2:00 PM
Switzerland	Tu, Oct. 26	9:00 AM	3:00 PM
Syria	Tu, Nov. 2	9:00 AM	4:00 PM
Thailand	Tu, Nov. 9	9:00 PM	9:00 AM
Turkey	Tu, Nov. 23	8:00 AM	4:00 PM
Uganda	Tu, Dec. 7	8:00 AM	4:00 PM
Uzbekistan	Tu, Dec. 14	7:00 AM	5:00 PM

For more information on the program, you can review our [flyer](#).



Click for Resources

We have launched our e-learning course on “[Mediation as an Effective Way of Resolving Disputes](#)”. The course is available on our website and on the learning platforms of the Funds and Programmes. It will help you understand the role of mediation and appreciate its effectiveness in resolving workplace conflicts. Be one of the first ones to get your certificate and share it with us!

The Global Mediation Panel (GMP) Africa Regional meeting took place on June 23, and it was our honor to host Ken Feinberg as our star speaker. He is one of the best known figures in the field of mediation and dispute resolution. We look forward to the upcoming GMP Regional meetings at which we’ll have more guest speakers.

On May 4, the Office of the Ombudsman joined Hannan Sulieman in the event titled “Conversation with UNICEF Deputy Executive Director (DED) Management” to discuss how UNICEF personnel can best resolve workplace disputes. DED Sulieman noted how strengthening our services will help ensure that UNICEF’s workplace behaviors are aligned with its organizational values. “We have pledged to use mediation to address workplace disputes and, wherever possible, resolve them,” she said. Over 2,500 colleagues joined the conversation and submitted more than 100 questions!

Upcoming Projects

Several unique, exciting projects are in the works. Be sure not to miss them!

1. Have you ever wondered what a mediation session looks like? You are about to see, as we are making videos to show you the “magic” that happens behind the scenes.
2. In addition, we are producing a new, short video on “How to start mediation and what to expect”, which will be very useful if you have decided to embark on the mediation process.
3. Last but not least, we are launching a project that will illustrate in an animated video the stories of colleagues who have taken part in mediation (respecting anonymity and confidentiality, of course). Real life experiences can help other colleagues decide on mediation as a mechanism to resolve their workplace disputes.

Managing Performance-Related Conflicts



James Lee
Senior Conflict-Resolution Expert



Linda Schieber
Consultant Ombudsman



Kevin Brown
Consultant Ombudsman

Available in French here

1. I fear that if I contact the Ombudsman or ask for a mediation, my supervisor might retaliate.

When the Office of the Ombudsman (Office) was established in 2002, the Executive Heads made it very clear that any supervisor who retaliated against staff members for exercising their rights would face stern measures. The Executive Heads and the Ombudsman Team continue to stress staff members' rights to use the Office services – and that such use is in the best interests of the organization. The incidence of retaliation has, in fact, decreased over the years.

The Mediation Pledge, recently signed by all the organizations the Office serves and found in the Office 2020 annual report, <https://fpombudsman.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FPO-Annual-Report-2020-23042021.pdf>, provides further assurance. In the Pledge, each organization commits to discussing the possibility of resolving workplace conflicts through mediation; this should remove any remaining fear staff may have of supervisor retaliation.

2. What is the best time to deal with performance issues?

There is no bad time for dealing with performance issues – they are always present and may be positive or negative. All the Office annual reports say that staff members should never be surprised when they receive their appraisal; they should always be monitoring how work is proceeding as well as staff/management relationships. With this approach, any potential for conflict or difference of opinion can be caught at an early stage. Keeping this in mind, it may be possible to maintain a positive and productive relationship during the reporting period.

Official mechanisms such as the mid-term review give staff members a clear picture of their standing when carried out in a timely manner. But more importantly, it is the job of both a good manager and a responsible staff member to be in touch often to ensure that any differences of opinion are dealt with before any full-blown conflict arises. Frequent informal discussions can go a long way towards ensuring that performance appraisal becomes a mutually satisfactory exchange of views.

3. My performance evaluation is only two weeks away – we have some fundamental differences. What can I do?

All Office annual reports over the years have included sections devoted to performance evaluation, with numerous recommendations made. We have generally encouraged staff to consult us as soon as possible – it is always easier to deal with conflict before it escalates. Still, even if there are fundamental differences between a supervisor and a supervisee, it is more effective to deal with them in a separate Office session than to raise them during a meeting designed to discuss performance evaluation.

So, if your evaluation is coming soon, prepare by noting down exactly what you perceive as the reasons for the fundamental differences. These can span a wide range of issues in the modern workplace, and they may affect the perception of your performance. Remember that your supervisor may not see things the same way you do. When you raise a matter, try to avoid confrontation: it almost always leads to a hardening of positions. You might wish to say that you are concerned about a few things that have happened recently and would like to talk them over. If you have prepared for your supervisor's reaction, it may be easier to show genuine concern and not set up immediate barriers to a constructive conversation. Remember that your supervisor has the responsibility to make the team successful and you are a member of that team. Look for ways in which you can express your point of view without presuming to tell your supervisor how to supervise. If you still feel a mediator would help, you can always mention the Mediation Pledge, discussed above.

4. Even though my performance appraisal is completed, I feel I still have a bad relationship with my supervisor. How could mediation help?

Interpersonal workplace relationships are often key instigators of workplace conflict, and the Office is here to assist. Mediation is only one of the services provided by the Ombudsman; other services include guidance, conflict coaching, shuttle diplomacy, and other types of assistance to help personnel increase their conflict competencies.

If a staff member continues to have a difficult relationship with the supervisor, it may be time for mediation, in which a third-party neutral

Continued on next page

Managing Performance-Related Conflicts Continued

can assist both to air their differences. Once the staff member is prepared emotionally, physically, and psychologically to sit at a table (virtually or in-person) with the other party, the mediator will facilitate a conversation with the sole objective of helping the parties have a respectful dialogue focused on improving their workplace interpersonal relationships.

5. I'm dissatisfied with my performance appraisal – what avenues are open to me?

We often hear this question in the Office. If your overall rating is lower than expected, simply signing the appraisal doesn't mean that you agree with it – but you should be prepared to state clearly your objections to the parts with which you disagree. Often a face-to-face discussion with the manager will enable both sides to take steps that may make the assessment more palatable. Consulting the Office might be useful at this point – particularly for examining the language and communicating your point of view. A facilitated conversation, either with an Ombudsman or a Mediator, could be helpful. None of these steps is too late and could still result in positive change if the parties are able to agree.

If the rating is very low, you may want to consult Human Resources to see if you can rebut. Guidelines address the eligibility of a performance appraisal for a rebuttal, which is a formal process. Be aware that the process can take considerable time and there is no guarantee of a positive result.

6. How can I deal with issues around a PIP without making the situation worse?

A PIP is difficult for both the manager and staff member. Yet, if conducted properly, it can be a very useful tool to help a staff member get back on track.

Many staff dread a PIP and believe that it is the first step towards termination, and we have witnessed situations where the intent of the PIP was abused. One method of ensuring that a PIP is used for the right reason is to ensure that objectives, deliverables, and deadlines are fair and within the individual's TOR and capabilities. Each item in the PIP requires a clear understanding by both the supervisor and supervisee and must be achievable.

If the PIP is appropriately designed, with the involvement of HR, and the staff member is monitored regularly throughout and provided with constant feedback, then the PIP has every chance of success, providing both the supervisee and supervisor are interested in succeeding.

The Ombudsman can certainly become involved if either party believes that the PIP is being used inappropriately or there are hidden agendas at play. Contact with us is confidential, and we can provide independent advice regarding the situation.

How to Succeed in Workplace Mediation



Dr Karl Mackie CBE,
Member of the International Advisory Board, Founder President, CEDR

As someone who has worked on both commercial and workplace disputes over my career, I thought I would pick out some of the factors that I believe make a particular difference to results and feelings in cases of workplace strife. Invariably, they are difficult situations because a real problem will have been articulated that is hard enough to merit a call for separate third party intervention, rather than management, to resolve the situation. Here are some thoughts on what can help such interventions to work.

The power of an outsider's focus and curiosity

Workplace situations, such as a breakdown of the relationship between an employee and management, or within a workplace team, are unfortunately all too common. After all, most of us live a large percentage of our lives at the workplace (even if sometimes that looks like home for those who may currently be oppressed by pandemic lockdowns). So it is common to have experiences of being misheard, ignored, or treated badly relative to others or to our own expectations. Such situations are often unhelpfully characterised as 'grievances' (rather than 'concerns') and can pull us into formal processes of case review and decision-making based on uncomfortable confrontations.

It is important to remember that mediation can and should bring a fresh energy to such situations. Someone new, a mediator, is parachuted in. This person will have no stake in the history, can act as an honest sounding board, and can show genuine curiosity and concern about what might have happened – and what is needed to change matters for the better. Their primary role is to bring a fresh sense of energy and re-awakening for sometimes intractable situations.

This switch, to a light being focused on the situation by someone who brings an open mindset and active listening, is far more powerful than we normally appreciate. After all, there probably has been a corrosive history, accompanied by distrust between staff or staff and management. By asking open questions, seeking to understand, and empathising in an appropriate way, mediators can set the tone for a willingness to step back and consider more deeply the respective stories of the parties, and how these need to evolve for people to go back to a situation of greater comfort.

The manager who is directly involved may have built up their own sense of grievance about having to deal with 'someone difficult', so their emotions also need recognition and expression, but with a reminder of the need for realistic outcomes as the goal of mediation interventions.

Of course, the options will vary for different circumstances, but it is vital to acknowledge that the mediator is 'working for all parties', not for just one, in order to change conflicts and reduce the likely distrust of any proposals for change or reconciliation that may emerge.

Making the most of an intervention

Mediators need to be briefed well in order to understand a situation in depth and what might be needed to turn it around. So preparation is important – both the mediator and the parties may compile relevant documentation around the history, the requirements of the role, any incidents, how the organisation has intervened to date and with what personnel and resources, and what procedures and precedents govern the situation.

The mediator's curiosity and ability to frame the problem as a joint difficulty can help others question their assumptions about what management precedents apply and what other routes there are to change.

Finally, remember the mantra – 'test and adjust'. In a difficult human situation, it is unlikely that one first solution will be enough. Everyone involved must be encouraged to reflect more deeply on the past and on options available. Without appropriate 'buy-in', the situation may re-emerge – so do not lose people's trust by fixing too early or too rigidly on solutions. If an intervention does not work, you can try another variation later – people's attitudes and circumstances may have opened up in the meantime.

Managers and workers are increasingly expected to show flexibility, and empathy. And that always applies to effective mediation.

Effective Supervisors Embrace Mediation



Laila T. Ollapally
Member of the International
Advisory Board

Conflict can be an opportunity for growth if supervisors and supervisees are equipped with the skills to handle, in a positive way, the challenges that exist when there are differences and disagreements.

Denial, blame and the need to appear as a victim are the intuitive responses to conflict. They keep parties from taking responsibility for what is happening. Some supervisors may try to quell the conflict or just focus on who is winning the argument. But enlightened supervisors who understand mediation instead embrace the conflict, using it as an opportunity to learn, understand and draw issues out. With this approach, conflicting parties are encouraged to express and understand each other's views, see value in each other's perspectives, and collaborate to find mutually acceptable solutions. They are invited to identify themselves as part of the problem so they can become part of the solution. Instead of victims, they become players responding to a challenge, masters of their actions, and leaders in the making who take responsibility for any situation they are involved in.

Mediation is a sine qua non of the new age workplace, where it is normal for disagreements to occur between supervisors and supervisees, or among team members. A wise and knowledgeable supervisor ensures that conflict resolution systems are well designed. He or she knows how to filter the disputes as they come in and how to channel them to the appropriate forum.

Mediation both instructs the parties and facilitates conflict resolution. Supervisors and supervisees can learn the valuable skill of having difficult conversations, understanding the source of conflict, and working together to find creative and sustainable solutions. In this process, two valuable employees in the organisation can learn effective communication and problem-solving skills which they take back to the workplace.

Unlike formal dispute resolution processes, which are adversarial, retributive and backward-looking, mediation shines a light on the past but does not stop there. It moves parties into the future by helping them find terms for a mutually acceptable resolution of the dispute. Through this search for a solution, they often transcend the conflict and move to higher levels of being.

Organisations that provide access to robust conflict resolution systems that include mediation can create teams that are more self-expressive, confident, collaborative and productive. The strict confidentiality rules in mediation ensure that there is no prejudice if the parties are unable to find a mutually acceptable solution. Further, trying mediation does not mean committing to finding a resolution: the option to move into a judicial or quasi-judicial process is always available if mediation does not seem like the right approach.

Conflict can be an opportunity for growth. To quote Jalaluddin Rumi
"The wound is the place where the light enters"

Informal vs. Formal Solutions: Recommended Practices to Resolve Workplace Disputes



Ken Cadigan
Investigation Specialist
OIAI, UNICEF

Available in Spanish here

Informal versus formal solutions: Recommended practices to resolve workplace disputes

All UNICEF employees occasionally encounter conflict in workplace interactions with colleagues and supervisors. Without resolution, these issues can escalate and may rise to the level of misconduct that may require a more formal intervention.

Possible misconduct should always be reported to the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI). When these issues are reported, OIAI's intake team assesses them to determine whether a formal investigation by OIAI is necessary. OIAI is limited by the nature of its role in how it can work with the parties to resolve any underlying conflict using other means. But there are a range of other informal mechanisms and remedies available.

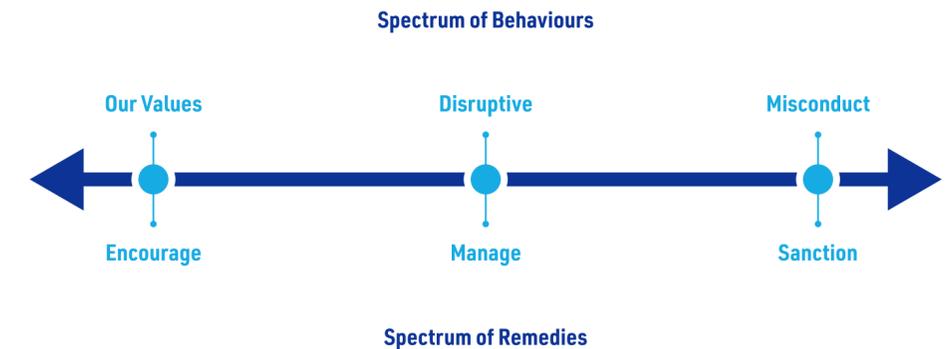
A range of remedies to address the spectrum of behaviours

The UNICEF integrity framework includes policies, procedures and guidance that help shape our workplace interactions, as illustrated by the spectrum of behaviours and remedies included here. Values-based behaviours create a safe and harmonious work environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, so they are encouraged. Questionable behaviours (e.g., minor offences, conflicts, borderline issues) must be managed closely, possibly through informal channels of resolution, such as mediation through the Office of the Ombudsman. Unacceptable behaviours, including fraud and misconduct, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, harassment and abuse of authority, may warrant formal resolution that starts with an investigation by OIAI.

The role of OIAI

A key element of UNICEF's integrity framework, OIAI provides independent and objective assurance, investigative and consulting services, mainly through internal audits and investigations, while maintaining discretion over how it conducts its activities. Once potential misconduct is reported, OIAI will perform an assessment of the facts provided to determine if the situation warrants investigation or referral to another office, typically Human Resources or management.

Contacting OIAI, however, does not necessarily immediately lead to an investigation. It is often possible and appropriate to have a conversation about the best way forward and the possibility of using informal channels for resolution in lieu of moving directly to an investigation.



During its assessment, OIAI may advise management that mediation services have not yet been explored as a means of informal dispute resolution. However, the decision to pursue mediation ultimately rests with the individuals and offices involved.

You have options!

Where feasible and appropriate, OIAI encourages management and staff to seek the least intrusive means of response, while recognizing that informal resolution channels may not be viable options in all cases.

UNICEF has invested significantly in providing a range of services for staff as they navigate interactions in the workplace, all aimed at empowering staff to embrace and uphold our organizational values. UNICEF endorses consultation with the Office of the Ombudsman as one option to help determine the most appropriate means for responding to questionable behaviour and troublesome relationships. Other options include consulting with your manager, an HR officer or a peer support volunteer (PSV), a Staff Representative or Staff Counsellor, or with the Division of Human Resources (DHR) or the Ethics Office.

In general, the availability of formal and informal channels allows all parties involved to ensure that solutions are tailored to individual needs and circumstances.

For more information about OIAI, UNICEF personnel can visit our [intranet](#) to find detailed FAQs and a guide for staff detailing the investigation process. Others can visit the OIAI public website to learn more about our investigations work and how to report wrongdoing.

Musings of Two Mediators: Perspectives on the Asian Workplace



Shanti Abraham
Mediator, Global
Mediation Panel
Malaysia



Raymond Lee
Mediator, Global
Mediation Panel
Indonesia

In Asia, we are not all the same. The Asian workplace is a kaleidoscope of diversity and perceptions resulting from what each staff member brings into it. A manager coming into that workplace must be aware that there is a cultural lens, shaped by hierarchy, nationality, race, gender, educational background, accent and religion, through which staff members view and assess each other as well as the manager.

An incoming manager may complain, 'My employees never tell me when things go wrong,' or 'They shut down when I raise my voice,' or 'They just keep quiet when I correct them'. To help address some of these concerns, we offer a couple of generalisations and some tips.

The first generalisation to emphasise is that every Asian and long-term resident in Asia understands the concept, the risks and the value of 'Face'. Because face-saving is so critical, disputes may commence with polite, passive overtures that disguise the real underlying feelings, and supervisees may be reluctant to speak openly and honestly to supervisors. Because disagreement may be conveyed politely, an international manager who is unfamiliar with this approach can miss subtle warning signs that a problem is brewing.

Our second generalisation is that Asian communication styles tend to circle around what a superior or person in authority wants to hear. Staff members are often concerned that a vindictive reaction or a retaliation may be exacted upon the person who raised an issue. For managers coming from cultures where communication is linear and unambiguous, this can be perplexing. 'Why won't they just be candid?'

To help international professionals appreciate these cultural elements, we offer the following tips:

1. Transparency from staff comes out of earned trust.

If you discover staff have kept something from you, do not assume they are dishonest. It might be a comfort issue. So create open, informal channels to allow staff to express concerns.

2. Take an interest in staff members' personal lives and families, and in the culture of the individuals in the office.

3. Learn what may be acceptable and unacceptable to individual cultures. Doing so shows you care.

4. Be prepared for personal questions.

Staff members will be naturally curious about your marital status, whether you have children, and matters which may in other cultures be deemed private. Don't be offended. In fact, prepare your responses for such questions as, 'Why aren't you married?', 'Why don't you have children?' or 'What is your religion?'. Humour may help, but be cautious. It can be misunderstood.

5. Family is a big focus in Asia. Attend weddings, circumcisions, or other events if invited, and attend funerals by default.

Attendance at weddings by a manager gives face to the staff member. If there is a death in a staff member's immediate family, visit the home to convey your condolences in person. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, it is common to give a little cash to the staff member. Some funerals will even have collection initiatives, especially if the deceased had a lot of expenses or passed away leaving a young family.

6. Take staff out for a meal from time to time.

Food is a big focus in Asia, and food sensitivity is an important part of cultural awareness. It is good to become familiar with the cuisine of the cultural community as part of the onboarding exercise.

To conclude, cultural appreciation is a two-way street - it applies to everyone, international professionals and local staff alike. Disputes are often rooted in missed opportunities to understand each other. Managers already in Asia may need to help their staff members prepare for the sensitivities of international professionals and local staff who will be bringing their own diverse cultural perspectives.

An African Perspective on Workplace Mediation



James Mang'erere
Mediator, Global
Mediation Panel
Kenya



Brenda Brainch
Mediator, Global
Mediation Panel
Kenya

Labour and employment issues in most of Africa have typically been managed through Unions and Tribunals. In that context, collective bargaining, courts and tribunals often tend to favour employers. At the same time, African States have subscribed to international labour standards, which have given further voice to employees.

Today, what we call 'workplace issues' can be addressed through a variety of processes, mediation being one of them. Mediation addresses imbalances of power between parties by creating a safe space for them to air and resolve concerns and grievances, as well as deep-rooted contentious matters, on terms that work for them.

African societies are traditionally hierarchical. Non-African co-workers and managers may not appreciate an inherent tendency for their local team to take a stance of 'obedience' and 'acceptance' rather than seeking to achieve the 'meeting of minds' that is encouraged in today's business environment.

We cannot look at workplace relationships in isolation from broader society. For any relationship to function - let alone flourish - those involved need the basics of common ground and cooperation. Where these basics are missing due to misunderstandings over communication, questions of performance, and benefits and entitlements, the relationship flounders. Such misunderstandings can foster perceptions of dominance, even discrimination, where none may be intended; thus, issues are sometimes experienced as interpersonal as opposed to business-related. The upshot profoundly impacts employee performance, effectiveness, workplace satisfaction, wellbeing, trust and team cohesion.

Mediation offers an opportunity to set this straight, ideally before issues escalate into a formal procedure whose outcome is determined by an external party based on legal rights. Mediation, instead, focuses on what matters most to the parties involved and what they may need to move forward in the relationship regardless of status, and the outcome is determined by the parties.

Here are some types of situations where mediation might be helpful:

Allegations of harassment or bullying can be a matter of perspective. The alleged 'offender' may not realise that his or her manner of communication or behaviour had a detrimental impact on a colleague. The alleged offensive behaviour may be result from differences in cultures or upbringing, or simply not understanding boundaries that need to be respected. If both parties agree to mediation, communication lines are opened towards a clearer understanding of acceptable boundaries. However, mediation requires commitment to openness; one cannot engage in the process without will—that's why voluntariness is one of the foundational principles of mediation.

Staff may fear discussing **Performance Evaluations** with their manager. But the confidentiality of mediation allows each party to feel comfortable asking and answering questions in an environment that is both safe and non-confrontational, with a view to better understanding and resolution.

Workplace conflict is not always between supervisees and supervisors. **Misunderstandings arise between staff**, restricting productivity and even impacting their wellbeing. Working in international institutions has its own level of complexity, where staff from different cultures and backgrounds have differing expectations of behaviour, and the chances of misunderstanding are greater. Misunderstandings need to be aired promptly to keep them from festering and spreading, and mediation creates a supportive environment where this airing can happen.

Dealing with conflict in the workplace is far more effective in the less formal environment of mediation, where both parties understand that operating as adversaries is counterproductive and that a more team-oriented environment results in greater wellbeing and productivity.

Mediation Champion



Zvezdana Mitic
Senior Programme Manager
Office of Information and
Communications Technology
United Nations / UNOPS

In each edition of the Mediation Newsletter, we'll announce a mediation champion – a colleague in the five UN organizations who actively supports mediation services by referring cases to the Office of the Ombudsman, engages with the Office in various activities (such as training, webinars, etc.), and encourages staff to use mediation in appropriate cases.

How does mediation help in your work?

Having happy, content and productive teams as well as team members is a key objective of any UNOPS Manager. Open communication, respect and trust are musts for successful and productive teams. In my work, I have often turned to mediation services to help resolve workplace disputes or miscommunications and improve engagement where there was a lack of respect and/or a hostile working environment.

One especially challenging area is when a team faces downsizing due to financial constraints. This is always a difficult and stressful time for all involved. With the support of the Office of the Ombudsman, one can manage to find solutions that enable meeting both staff's and organization's interests. Having an ombuds or mediator as a neutral party to clarify and confirm certain entitlements as well as support staff in difficult decisions they have to make is critical in helping to reduce tension in some very stressful situations.

When do you consider referring a potential conflict to the Office of the Ombudsman for mediation?

I refer potential conflicts to the Office of the Ombudsman whenever there is a situation in the workplace that cannot be dealt with at my level, and as a helpful resource when two sides are not satisfied with proposed solutions or outcomes and before further escalation of a dispute. In such situations I either reach out to the Office of the Ombudsman myself or recommend to the involved parties that they do so. Of course, this is a voluntary process and aggrieved parties can choose whether to participate in a mediation process. It is also very important in such situations to advise UNOPS Programme personnel of other available resources, such as Internal Grievances, Ethics Office, Peer Support Network, etc.

How can staff benefit from mediation services?

Sometimes staff members or contractors do not trust managers or clients, or they may not have a chance to be properly heard, especially if they work in different or isolated locations. Turning to mediation services provides an opportunity for a staff member to express their concerns in a safe and neutral environment. Mediation services are confidential and provided by trained mediators who are first and foremost impartial third persons. Mediators make sure that all the sides in the conflict are given appropriate time and space to talk, freely and safely, about what is troubling them. It is always important to inform staff that any information shared during the mediation process cannot be disclosed unless there is a serious risk of harm to either themselves or others.

As far as mediation is concerned, do you have any advice for colleagues?

Mediation is a very effective and timely way to deal with unresolved conflicts, disputes, misunderstandings and miscommunication in the workplace. It is a great management tool to have two or more people who are involved in a challenging situation meet on the same call, or face to face, with a professional mediator to discuss areas of concern and/or differences of opinion. If turned to early on to resolve disputes, mediation can often avoid costly litigation and/or long-drawn-out formal complaints and processes such as UNDT, etc. Therefore, whenever you have a situation that cannot be handled at a management level, please reach out to the Ombudsman Office. Personally, I have had a great experience working with this office: we have managed to come up with amicable solutions, not only for individuals but also for entire teams. I do believe that with open and honest conversations, which can be facilitated by a mediator or ombuds, most internal conflicts in an office can be resolved.

**OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN
FOR UNITED NATIONS
FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES**

If you'd like to reach out to the Mediation Unit, you can contact us at:

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