

Engineering Peace: Achieving the promise of mediation in the world's most difficult conflicts. Part 4.

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Tina Monberg (MediationCenter.A/S)

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This is the fourth and final posting in a [series](#) written by Tina Monberg, Irena Vanenkova, Michael Leathes and Nadja Alexander. In the [last posting](#) we discussed two factors that we think are critical to changing mindsets and increasing the systematic use of mediation in intractable, politically-charged and violent conflict. They are:

1. Bringing more awareness to the need for sophisticated convening skills to bring parties to the negotiating table.
2. Fostering a real understanding worldwide of what mediation is and how and why it works.

Today we talk about a third factor — instilling confidence among stakeholders and potential users in the quality of professional mediators to engage in the daunting task of peacemaking.

Quality and Selection of Peace Mediators

Mediation is a far more advanced, highly sophisticated skill than many people realise. Great mediation – and anything less than great is inadequate in the type of conflicts that we are discussing here – places an enormous strain on mediators to get their role and interventions exactly right at every step. Skills that are beyond mediation are also required – in particular inter-cultural proficiency. Mediation is a job for very special, highly trained people who are well-experienced in the science, art, psychology and basic grit of mediating.

There is now a huge body of training expertise in the world, but it needs to be geared to the type of conflicts that can result in damage to societies and economies. Experience always gives the best lessons, but can be replicated to some extent through simulations in well-constructed mediation training. Simulations need to be appropriate for facilitated peace negotiations and be based on real-world case studies as far as possible. Moreover, they are most effective and realistic when they allow trainees the freedom to be themselves rather than an artificial character in a documented scenario. A network of the world's best trainers, collectively capable of delivering programmes in a vast number of languages and cultural settings, is needed.

The competency of a mediator needs to be appreciated by the parties before they get engaged in the mediation process. They need to trust their mediators, and building that trust begins with what they know about the mediator. Trust is a fickle, irrational, thing. It is about relationships, respect, reputation, authority, confidence, wisdom, reliability and integrity. Mediators cannot expect parties to have blind faith about their credentials; they need to disclose much more about themselves in advance. Their profiles must credibly recite their experience in mediation. They need to open up about how other parties for whom they have mediated perceive their conflict resolution skills. Such insights into their credentials build rapid respect and trust and develop a feeling that this mediator is truly competent, which in turn exudes a positive inclination towards mediation itself.

But competency at all these levels is not the only attribute of quality. Equally important is suitability. The mediator, and his or her support team, needs to be genuinely accepted by all constituencies involved in the dispute in order to perform their role effectively. Their personalities, prior achievements and experiences and philosophical attitudes, all have a subtle yet powerful bearing on being accepted by disputing parties.

In addition, inter-cultural management and communication competency is necessary in almost every case. A deep knowledge of all relevant cultural frameworks, patterns and perspectives, the ability to adjust and interpret communication styles and manage the mediation process across different cultural norms, and a detailed appreciation of cultural focus areas is all essential.

Capturing all this systematically is readily achievable through appropriate training, schemes that generate experience and independent performance assessments. It would be valuable to all parties for all peace mediators to be part of a global, high-level credentialing scheme through which the profiles of all qualifying mediators were searchable online. [The International Mediation Institute](#) has developed a credentialing scheme that, we think, can be applied to international peace mediators.

Looking Ahead

The progress made in the past five years in recognising the principle and value of mediation in achieving peace has been nothing short of extraordinary. The demand is there. Multilateral organizations now need to translate that interest and demand into the development of their capabilities as Convenors, promoting understanding of what mediation is and how and why it works, and most critically of all developing a strong cadre of highly-trained, multi-talented inter-cultural peace mediators whose skills are certified and who can be identified and valued easily.

One of the early mediation skills books was entitled [A Sudden Outbreak of Common Sense](#). If appropriate resources are dedicated to addressing understanding, quality and convening, outbreaks of peace could become more common than outbreaks of war.