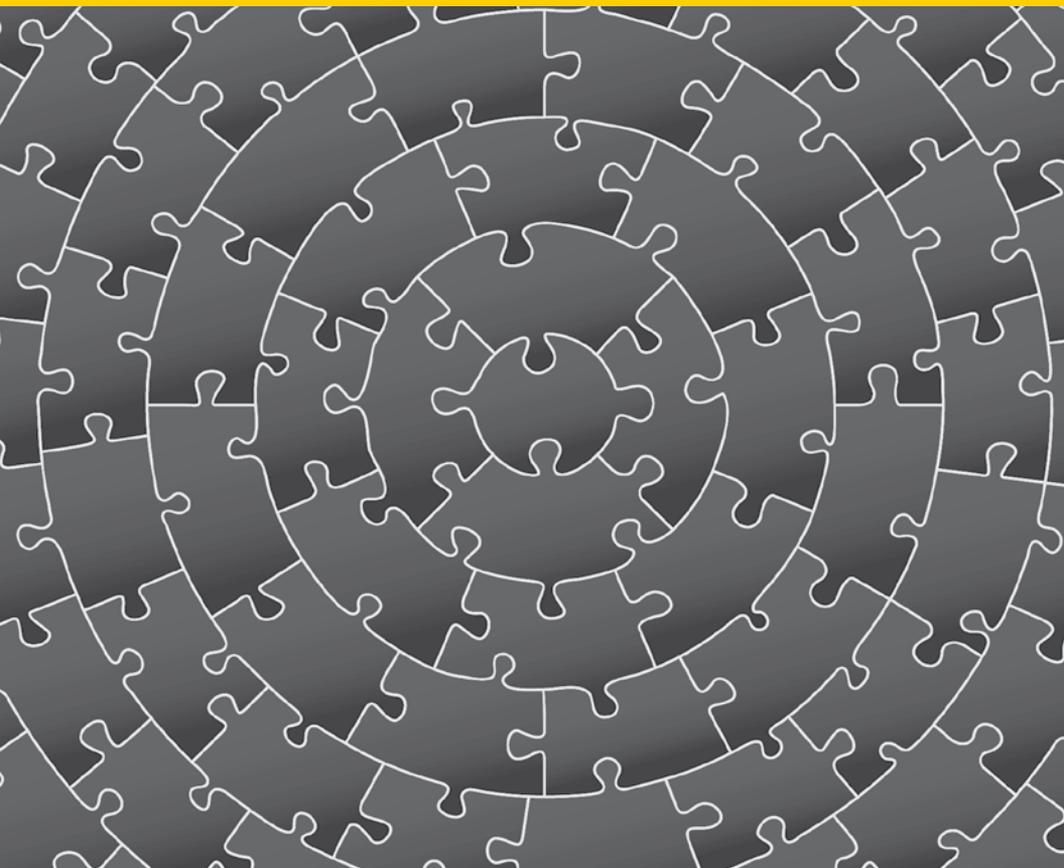




Debriefing
MEDIATORS
to Learn from Their
EXPERIENCES

Simon J.A. Mason and Matthias Siegfried



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to Learn from Their Experiences



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United States Institute of Peace
Washington, D.C.



The Peacemaker's Toolkit Series Editors: A. Heather Coyne and Nigel Quinney

The views expressed in this guide are those of the authors alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

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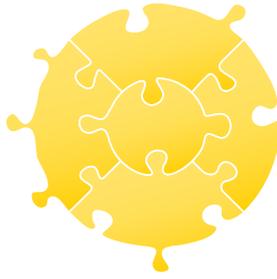
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Introduction

The goal of this handbook is to enhance the practice of mediation by showing how lessons from individual mediators can be identified and made available both to their home organization (e.g., a foreign ministry, intergovernmental organization, or nongovernmental organization) and to a wider practitioner audience. More particularly, the handbook gives guidance to staff debriefing mediators who are or have been directly involved in peace negotiations.

The focus here is *not* on self-assessments by the mediators themselves,¹ nor on evaluations of the mediator's performance by external donors, nor on political or psychological debriefing. Instead, this handbook examines *methodological debriefing*: that is, interviews conducted with the goal of learning lessons about the mediation method from the experience of a specific mediator that are useful for future mediation processes. Methodological debriefing is typically conducted by individuals who have not been directly involved in the mediator's work and who do not seek to judge it but who want to learn the mediator's perspective on what was done and why it was done. Ideally, the mediator will also benefit from the interview by discovering something new through the questions posed, by having the opportunity to recount a challenging experience, or at least by having her or his experiences documented in a structured and objective manner.

Exactly what questions should be asked of the mediator will vary from case to case. In most cases, however, many of the same broad subjects will be of interest to the interviewer. The appendices at the end of this book list a variety of generic questions that target common areas of inquiry. Among the key questions are the following:

- What was expected of the mediator?
- What was done by the mediator?

- How was it done?
- What did not work and what did?
- What lessons can be drawn from this?

If these questions are asked in a way that encourages candid self-reflection, the responses they elicit will add to the growing store of useful knowledge about the art and profession of mediation. Identifying and disseminating the lessons of specific mediation efforts is essential if other mediators are to recognize instructive parallels between their own work and past mediation efforts and to identify the kinds of resources and tools that will enhance their chances of promoting peace processes.

Other Forms of Debriefing Mediators

There are at least three forms of debriefing mediators: methodological, political, and psychological. This handbook addresses only the first of these because it has the greatest potential benefit in terms of enhancing our understanding of the art of mediation in general and thus of stimulating improvements in the practice of mediation in all sorts of circumstances. Political debriefing and psychological debriefing tend to be more useful in terms of specific conflicts and specific individuals, respectively.

Political debriefing: This kind of debriefing is focused on the specific conflict and on what to do in the next phase of the peace process. Typical questions include: What is the content of the peace agreement reached? What are the political implications? What can the parties live with and implement? What roles were played by whom, and what are their next steps?

Psychological debriefing: This form of debriefing is especially important in high-stress situations, where it can help individual mediators avoid long-term burnout or post-traumatic stress disorder—for example, in cases where the mediator has been threatened or the process was frustrating and unsuccessful. All mediators should be regularly debriefed, however, so that it becomes a routine step and so that the mediators that stand most to benefit from it are not overlooked. Psychological debriefing is a delicate process, and the debriefer (usually a psychologist) and the mediator should carefully prepare for and discuss the process before embarking on it. Typical questions include: Where were you as a mediator when you stepped into the process, how were you feeling, how did you experience the process? What do you need to deal with what happened on the personal level, to digest the experience and move forward? This kind of debriefing is often neglected in the mediation field because of a lack of funding or a failure to recognize its importance.

In the following chapters, this handbook lays out key considerations that should frame the conduct of debriefing and outlines the advantages and disadvantages of interviews in eliciting useful lessons. After a brief discussion, in the next chapter, of the role of the interviewer, the rest of the handbook lays out a four-step process. The first step is to prepare for the interview by getting to know the case and clarifying the specific questions and their relative priority. The second step is to conduct the interview. An inquisitive attitude and the use of open questions is useful at the beginning of the interview. Later, once trust has been built, more specific questions can be posed. Throughout, the interviewer's main task is to listen. The third step is to structure and analyze the experience. A delicate balance between the unique and general aspects of a certain case must be struck: if one gets lost in the details of the unique case, one will not see lessons applicable to other cases; if one focuses only on generalities, one does not learn anything new. Comparison with other cases, highlighting differences and similarities, and forming clusters of similar cases can be helpful. The fourth step is to disseminate the knowledge acquired. It is not sufficient to produce "cold," written knowledge; lessons have to be active and "hot" to be of use. Workshops tailored to the needs and experiences of participants, Communities of Practice, individual coaching, tutoring, and "intervision" are some of the live ways of disseminating lessons learned.

What You Need to Know as a Mediator

This handbook addresses mediation support staff, not mediators. However, mediators who are about to be debriefed can beneficially consider the following points:

Clarify the process framework . . .

Before starting the interview, clarify the purpose and timing of the debriefing process. Among other things, this entails reaching agreement with the interviewer on the format and target audience for the final product that results from the interview, and determining the level of access control of the material discussed in the interview (i.e., determining the level of confidentiality). Make sure the interviewer agrees to let you check the debriefing document before it is circulated.

. . . and the scope of the mediation process to be debriefed.

If the debriefing is to generate useful material, it is important to be clear about precisely which mediation process and what time period the interview will cover. The interviewer may need guidance on this, as he or she may not know enough about the case to judge its most important or interesting stages and phases.

Guide the interviewer . . .

Unlike a journalist's interview, the kind of methodological debriefing outlined in this handbook calls for you as the mediator to guide the interviewer. The main task of the interviewer is to listen. Your task is to pass on what you have learned from your mediation experience in as focused and coherent manner as possible. Prepare well: What are the five or so key messages you want to get across? What have you learned that could help other mediators in the future?

. . . but also let yourself be guided by the interviewer.

Some issues that may be interesting to an outsider to the process may not seem interesting to you. Let the interviewer guide you to these topics. Build up a relationship of trust with the interviewer so that you can jointly explore what can be learned from the specific case. The interviewer can bring in comparative knowledge and raise questions based on general mediation frameworks. These questions can help to highlight key points of your unique experience.

Embed Debriefing in a Knowledge Management Cycle

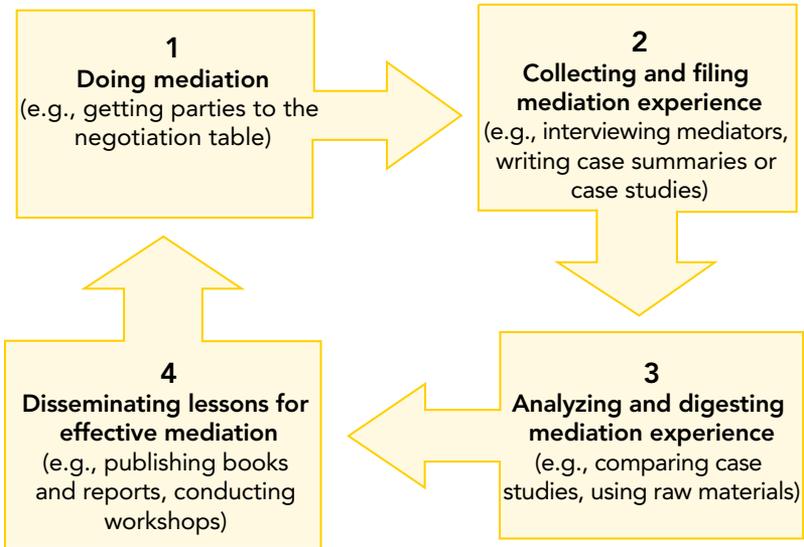
Debriefing must be seen, not as an isolated activity in a mediation process, but as an essential part of a larger organizational learning process known as knowledge management. This process consists of a broad range of practices that enable an organization to learn from past and ongoing activities. Knowledge management activities focus on the identification, development, dissemination, and storing of relevant knowledge.

Knowledge management can be seen (as in figure 1) as an ongoing learning process—an upwards-moving spiral—that consists of four steps, repeated numerous times, but each time at a higher level of expertise. These steps consist of (1) the mediation activity, (2) collecting and filing this experience, (3) analyzing it, and (4) disseminating the lessons. If this dissemination does not lead to better practice, the entire exercise has failed. Steps 2-4 of this knowledge management cycle correspond to steps 2-4 of this handbook. Step 1, preparing the interview, is not illustrated in figure 1.

This handbook is based on the work of the Mediation Support Project, which conducts methodological debriefing of mediators who work for the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (Swiss FDFA).²

“Thanks to our mediation knowledge management system,” remarks Ambassador Thomas Greminger, head of the Political Division IV (Human

Figure 1. The Mediation Knowledge Spiral



Security) of the Swiss FDFA, “we can communicate our work to the Swiss Parliament and the wider public in a much more solid and systematic manner. Internally, it is also very useful to build expertise. If a Swiss mediator or expert encounters a challenge, they can check the mediation summaries to see which cases are similar, and who was involved. They can then approach this person and the two can learn from each other.”

Although the work of the Swiss FDFA is the basis for much of the guidance in this handbook, the following chapters also reflect the experiences of individuals—interviewers and mediators—from a variety of institutional environments, including the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations.

The Peacemaker’s Toolkit

This handbook is part of the series *The Peacemaker’s Toolkit*, which is being published by the United States Institute of Peace.

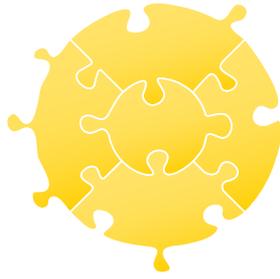
For twenty-five years, the United States Institute of Peace has supported the work of mediators through research, training programs, workshops, and publications designed to discover and disseminate the keys to effective mediation.

The Institute—mandated by the U.S. Congress to help prevent, manage, and resolve international conflict through nonviolent means—conceived of *The Peacemaker's Toolkit* as a way of combining its own accumulated expertise with that of other organizations active in the field of mediation. Most publications in the series are produced jointly by the Institute and a partner organization. All publications are carefully reviewed before publication by highly experienced mediators to ensure that the final product will be a useful and reliable resource for practitioners.

The Online Version

There is an online version of *The Peacemaker's Toolkit* that not only presents the text of this handbook but also connects readers to a vast web of information. Links in the online version give readers immediate access to a considerable variety of publications, news reports, directories, and other sources of data regarding ongoing mediation initiatives, case studies, theoretical frameworks, and education and training. These links enable the online *Toolkit* to serve as a “you are here” map of the larger literature on mediation.

The online version provides video clips of interviews with mediators that illustrate some of the aspects of debriefing mediators discussed in this handbook. These are also available at peacemediation.org/resources.



The Role of the Interviewer

What are the qualities of a good interviewer? People interviewing mediators should have experience and training in mediation and in interviewing. The better they know mediation, the more likely they are to discover interesting aspects of the mediator’s work. The key requisite for an interviewer is to be a good listener, someone who is ready to go on a “walk” with the mediator through her or his specific experience. Some basic knowledge of the mediation case is also necessary, so that the interviewer can fully appreciate what the mediator has to say and is better able to identify important aspects of the mediator’s experience. The interviewer should always remember that he or she is playing the role of learner (on behalf of the organization), not the role of teacher or evaluator.

As Antje Herrberg from the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) notes, clarity about the role of the interviewer is one of the key success factors in a debriefing: “When I am interviewing a mediator, my role and my goals need to be very clearly defined and I also communicate this to the mediator in an explicit and transparent way. This clarity is an important first step in building an atmosphere of trust.”

Get a Clear but Flexible Mandate

The interviewer should understand the nature and limits of the mandate he or she has been given by the organization that has commissioned the interview. If the interviewer has a long-term relationship of trust and is contractually bound to the organization, an oral mandate is often enough. If not, a written, more formalized mandate may be a good idea. Even so, a written mandate should not specify exactly what questions are to be posed or exactly how the interview should be run, because to do so would be to limit the room for creative interviewing and uncovering new insights and information.

The interviewer should clarify what kind of report is to be prepared on the basis of the interview, and whether it will be distributed only within the commissioning organization or to the wider public. Many organizations have mediation guidelines and sets of questions developed for their mediators. If the interviewer has read and internalized these, he or she will be much better prepared to shape questions that will elicit the kind of information the organization is looking for.

Once the interviewer has clarified his or her organizational mandate, the interviewer should explain that mandate to the mediator who is to be interviewed and secure the mediator's willingness to proceed. Most organizations expect their mediators to participate in some form of knowledge management and lessons-learned exercises. Nevertheless, the interviewer should ask the mediator for some sort of informal, oral mandate (e.g., "Yes, I understand what this is all about. I agree to being interviewed by you, I trust you will use the end product as you have indicated.").

Seek Continuity in the Organizational Setup

The interviewer's mandate is shaped by the organizational setup within which he or she is working. Different organizational setups present different advantages and disadvantages for interviewers. There are three basic arrangements:

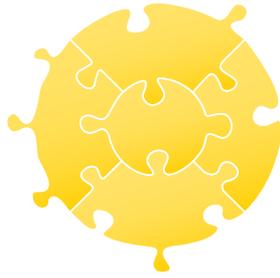
- **In-house mediator and interviewer:** The most common arrangement in a large, well-funded organization such as the United Nations or a foreign ministry is for a staff member, employed for his or her mediation expertise and knowledge management skills, to interview the mediators who work for that organization. Because the interviewer and the mediator are from the same organization, both are likely to be confident that the interview will be kept confidential and to be clear about the nature of the final product. Another advantage of this arrangement is that the interviewer will likely be a long-term employee and thus better placed not only to develop interviewing skills but also to compare cases and build up a relationship of trust with the mediators.
- **External interviewer:** A second arrangement involves an organization such as a foreign ministry tasking a third party (e.g., a consultant, an academic, or an NGO) to interview mediators employed by that

organization. Outsourcing knowledge management tasks can increase an organization's flexibility in relation to human resources. Enlisting a succession of different interviewers, however, makes it difficult to build up expertise on how to debrief mediators, and thus contracts between an organization and an external interviewer often specify a long-term partnership (as well as clarifying issues of confidentiality).

- **External mediator:** Sometimes an organization is interested in learning from a mediator who is not employed by that organization (but who may have been involved in a peace process in which the organization also participated) and will enlist its knowledge management staff to conduct the interview. In this arrangement, funding, confidentiality, and purpose of the exercise have to be clarified for each case.

Focus on Trust Building

Good debriefing of mediators requires confidence between the mediator and the interviewer. Only with trust will the mediator be frank and will fresh lessons emerge. The mandate and organizational setup must take this into consideration. The form of the interview should also be chosen so as to create trust. Interviews can take various forms (e.g., written exchanges, face-to-face encounters, telephone conversations) and interviewers can employ different ways of recording what they learn (e.g., written notes, audio recordings, video recordings). This handbook focuses on face-to-face oral interviews with the mediator, which have tended to engender the highest degree of trust and candor. Oral interviews also tend to bring out richer and fresher results than do written questionnaires answered by the mediator. The face-to-face dimension allows for a fruitful combination of self-reflection by the mediator and external reflection by the interviewer. The mediator should always have the chance to see and correct the text before it is submitted to the organization for which the mediator works. This guarantee of being able to edit the written report later for accuracy or political incorrectness helps to build trust and encourages the mediator to be more open and less guarded.



STEP 1

Prepare for the Interview

Preparation is the key to a focused interview. During this first step, the interviewer clarifies which mediation process the interview will target. The interviewer then tries to learn as much as possible about the process and the mediator, so as to develop the questions that will be asked in the interview. Preparation also entails clarifying the form of recording to be used, as well as the time and location of the interview.

Focus on a Specific Mediation Process and Time Period

As part of preparing for a specific interview, it is essential for the interviewer to clarify exactly which part and period of the mediation process is to be covered. In the Sudan North-South conflict, for example, the parties to the conflict met in more than twenty different formats. Thus, a mandate to “interview the mediator on the Sudan North-South peace process” is not sufficiently precise. Instead, the mandate should specify, for instance, “interview the chief mediator on the peace process led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development between 2002 and 2005.” The question of which process to focus on may be outside the interviewer’s control if it is specified in the mandate given to the interviewer. In other cases, however, the interviewer may be able to choose to focus on a particular phase of the mediation process or the mediator may point out what is an interesting process and appropriate phase to analyze.

Some mediation efforts have lasted years or decades with numerous mediators involved. Other efforts have lasted only a few days or months, with only one or a few mediators involved. The choice of focusing on a specific meeting, a few days of a process, or alternatively on a period of

months or years is decisive to the outcome of the learning process, but there is no objectively correct choice. Comparison of cases of a very different scale is difficult. Generally, the shorter the time frame analyzed, the more detailed and useful the lessons are concerning mediation tactics and micro-skills (e.g., answers to questions such as “What exact words did you use?” “How did you deal with the party when they walked out of the room?” “What did you do when the parties did not stop shouting?”). The longer the time frame analyzed, the easier it is to focus on more general issues such as mediation strategies, process design, the interaction between conflict context and process, the role of regional organizations, or third-party coordination. Many mediators point out that while mediation skills and tactics are important, the really challenging work is on the scale of process design and strategy as this requires dealing with extremely complex political contexts that change over time. Yet without this strategizing, one ends up only reacting to the conflict parties, rather than shaping the process.³

Get to Know the Peace Process

Once it is clear what to focus on, the interviewer must acquire sufficient knowledge of the specific process to make the interview useful.

As Antje Herrberg points out, preparing an interview means becoming familiar not only with the general conflict context but also with specific mediation challenges of this setup: “When I prepare for a debriefing session, I acquaint myself with the particular conflict that the mediator has been dealing with. But even more important, I try hard to put myself into the shoes of the mediator. I think about the pitfalls, the dangers, and the difficulties a mediator is confronted with in a specific case. From that perspective, I prepare a list of general questions that I can follow in the discussion.”

If the interviewer relies on available information to answer general questions during preparation, he or she will be able to move much faster during the interview to the less well-known and more specific areas of the mediator's work.

Preparation entails getting to know the background of the conflict and key dimensions of the peace process. There are two broad sources of preparatory information. One is public information available on the Internet and in books and articles, which helps to give the overall picture

(e.g., the large numbers of parties in the Burundi peace process in Arusha leading up to the accords of 2000) and indicates tricky points in the process (e.g., the two armed parties who did not join the Arusha process). The second source consists of internal documents and work reports—including drafts—already produced by the organization mandating the interviewer and/or the mediator, which provide important background information.

Connie Peck of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) notes, “Before interviewing special representatives of the UN Secretary-General for each conflict situation, I studied, among other things, the last few years of reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council and prepared a set of questions based on these reports.”

Get to Know the Mediator

Besides getting to know the peace process, it is useful to try and find out more about the experiences and personality of the mediator. This is easier in the case of high-profile and/or highly experienced mediators, who will probably have attracted significant press coverage.

Writing for a wider public interested in mediation, Harriet Martin, from the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, notes: “As I have a journalistic background, rather than an academic one, I am more interested in pulling out a story from the mediator which will help the reader understand a mediator’s personal experience of a process, rather than running through it as a technical exercise. Whether it’s a newspaper or a policy paper you are reading, it will always be more interesting if you have a sense of personality in the story. Lakhdar Brahimi is a huge personality. Having a career which has included politics as well as diplomacy, he has an unusually realist (and rather refreshing) approach towards what he calls ‘human rights purists.’ Material that challenges the current peacemaking orthodoxy is always intriguing to read.”

Highlighting the role of power in messy political processes can be contrasted to idealistic notions of what a mediator should or should not do.

Knowing more about the person being interviewed can help to build rapport and trust; can enable the interviewer to ask more interesting and pertinent questions, including questions that explore the impact of the mediator’s personal style and idiosyncrasies on his or her work; and can lead to a more textured report of the interview.

Develop a Set of Questions

The interviewer needs to decide what questions to ask and the relative importance of those questions. One approach to developing relevant and useful questions for the interview is to focus on general challenges and on the dilemmas that often arise in mediation processes, such as inclusivity, power and knowledge asymmetries between the conflict parties, accountability of the mediators, and use of coercion. Another approach is to interrogate the case from four angles: who, when, what, and how.

Who: Which Actors Were Involved in the Mediation?

Broadly speaking, interviewers debrief two groups of mediators: the chief mediator—for example, a special representative of the UN secretary-general (SRSG), a head of state, or an ambassador who has led a mediation team—and the mid-level mediators who are part of a mediation team. The role of the chief mediator is to hold the threads together, guide and supervise the process from above, and act as the interface between the peace process and the international community. It is a political role. The mid-level mediator is more involved in the day-to-day aspects of the peace process, facilitating committees and working groups, getting into the details of the work with the parties. Mid-level mediators are frequently better trained in mediation skills and process design than are chief mediators. As these two types of mediators play different roles, the questions posed to them should also be different.

Ideally, the interviewer will be able to interview both the chief mediator and the mid-level mediators who were involved in the same peace process.

“When you are preparing to interview a chief mediator, talk to his or her staff first,” comments Nita Yawanarajah from the Mediation Support Unit of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs. “By comparing what the chief mediator says and what his or her staff says, you can often shed light on the intuitive and especially interesting aspects of decision-making. Focus on the issues the staff observe, something that they found interesting or striking and that the mediator did naturally as part of his style. When interviewing the chief mediator, follow up the issue with a question. If the mediator was not aware of his or her actions or decisions, it can be assumed that he or she was acting from instinct or intuition. For example, in one case an SRSG decided to leave the peace process. His staff was not clear why he had done

this but felt the decision was wrong. In the interview, I tried to get more depth on this issue. When questioned, the mediator admitted that he had left the process because he felt that the process was not ripe. When questioned further, he said that if he had to analyze it he would say that the situation required something extra to ripen it such as leverage, personal relations, the support of powerful states, etc., that he did not bring to the mediation.”

If the aim of the debriefing is to learn about mediation practice, it is essential to interview others in addition to the chief mediator, as the lessons from mid-level mediators are often richer and conceptually clearer. The chief mediator, however, can shed more light on the political constraints of a process.

When: Which Phase of the Peace Process Are We Dealing with?

A peace process can be broken into three phases: prenegotiation, negotiation, and implementation. In the prenegotiation phase, a mediator may be in contact with the conflict parties over years or even decades—building trust, getting to understand the issues at stake, exploring the conditions talks or “talks about talks” are possible, and establishing the process framework. In the negotiation phase, the parties gradually become more involved in the process. The mediator may sit in the same room with the conflict parties and structure and facilitate the process by, for example, collecting issues, setting the agenda, working through the issues, drafting mutually acceptable proposals, and making sure the relevant topics are addressed. Alternatively, the mediator may shuttle between the two parties, as Jimmy Carter did between Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin at Camp David in 1978. In the implementation phase, mediators are also often needed, as many issues may arise that have not been dealt with sufficiently in the peace agreement. In practice, the distinctions between these three phases are blurred, especially when multiple mediation efforts are under way simultaneously, with different efforts being in different phases. Nevertheless, for an interviewer it is a helpful framework, for a mediator will stress particular aspects of his or her work during particular phases.

A key question in an interview, for example, is how the mediator became involved in the peace process, and in which phase he or she started and stopped his mediation effort.

Connie Peck of UNITAR points out: “Entry points for mediation are particularly interesting. In one case, a United Nations representative was asked by the parties to be an observer for their negotiation process, but when the talks became bogged down and made little progress, they asked him to become the mediator. I therefore asked the mediator: ‘Why do you think the parties came to trust you in this phase of the peace process? What did you do that helped to build that trust?’”

What: What Topics Were Addressed?

Key topics relevant for peace negotiations involve security (e.g., the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former fighters), justice and human rights (e.g., the protection of victims of human rights abuses), state and institution building (e.g., power sharing, constitutional reform, elections), and economy and environment (e.g., wealth sharing, investment, sustainable development). Topics such as gender and women's participation should be included in all the above fields because any agreement that ignores the interests of women is unlikely to be sustainable. The interviewer should be familiar with the basic concepts and challenges in these different fields to be able to relate to the experiences of the mediator.

In one peace process, for example, both power sharing (in the form of a political system to give marginalized regions more influence) and wealth sharing (the conflict involved oil and land) were key issues in the negotiations. Knowing this, the interviewer could ask a question such as: “How were the two topics linked in the negotiations? What did you do to bring the work done in the topical subcommittees together?”

The interviewer should also quiz the mediator on the process by which the agenda for the peace process was set. Ideally, a mediator sets the agenda before working through the various agenda points. This helps to focus the negotiations. The parties, however, will be concerned about the sequence, about when “their” topic will appear on the agenda (e.g., security arrangements first, or power-sharing arrangements first).

How: How Did You Mediate?

Mediation style and the nuts and bolts of what was done and why it was done are at the heart of the interview. Various styles are used at different

moments in a peace process, so a key question is how different styles were used and combined. How was “low-powered” (or facilitative) mediation combined with “high-powered” (or directive) mediation? When were the mediators involved in formulating drafts (formulative mediation)? A key question for an interviewer in this context is for example: “How do you know when you have to shift from a facilitative to directive style, or from directive to facilitative?”

Value Serendipity

While the interviewer should develop a set of questions that cover all the key elements of the mediator’s work, the interviewer must be ready and willing to explore unanticipated issues that arise during the course of the interview. By valuing serendipity, the interviewer can chance upon new insights into the mediator’s art and craft. This helps one avoid getting stuck in standardized procedures and questionnaires, which is precisely the danger of “how-to” handbooks such as this one, if they are followed blindly.

One useful way of valuing serendipity and the exploration of the unexpected is to focus on how mediation skills stand in relation to the ever-changing political context and the unique personality of the mediator.

“I usually try to cover three sets of issues,” says Harriet Martin. “First, political questions, usually about key moments in the story of the mediation and the diplomatic pressures the mediator worked under. Second, technical ones, approach to human rights, power and wealth sharing, techniques used, implementation, etc. Third, personal, presumptions at the start, how they changed, what you learnt. It makes it much more interesting—and certainly more readable—to address how a mediator tackles technical issues if they are packaged in the political context in which the mediation takes place and with the personal perspective of the mediator. By understanding mediation as a story, the technical side of it gets naturally rooted in the drama and narrative of the process. Without this context, the theory of it can make little sense.”

This is not the same as the political and psychological debriefing (mentioned in the feature box “Other Forms of Debriefing Mediators”); instead, the idea is that the unique political and psychological aspects of a peace process help to explain why certain techniques were used and new

approaches were developed. This focus on what was unique opens the door to serendipity, and prevents one from listening with a preconceived notion of what mediation is or should be.

Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, a Kenyan mediator, recommends asking mediators “how they make use of accidental meetings—serendipity happens in such moments.”

Sometimes key moments in mediation take place outside the formal process during chance encounters and relaxed conversations between the mediator and the parties or other actors in the peace process. By asking mediators if and how they make use of such unplanned but meaningful exchanges and transformative experiences, the interviewer can get a sense of the extent to which the mediator values serendipity.

Determine How to Record the Interview

The form of recording depends mainly on the wishes of the mediator. If there is sufficient trust between the mediator and the interviewer on how the material will be used, then an audio recording—supplemented by the interviewer's notes—is the easiest form for capturing the interview. Video recording is also an option, but generally people are more self-conscious in front of a video camera, and therefore more guarded, than in front of a microphone or an interviewer scribbling notes. Some mediators may ask for a guarantee that the recording will be erased once the text has been transcribed. If confidentiality is not guaranteed, or if the topic is highly sensitive, mediators will generally feel more comfortable and be more open if they are not recorded. Audio recordings can be mislaid, and if they end up in the wrong hands, the mediator cannot deny having said what he or she said. If the interviewer's notes get lost and are made public, the mediator can always claim that the interviewer misunderstood what he or she said. Highly sensitive interviews are therefore usually not recorded, and the report of the interview is based only on written notes.

Whether the interview is recorded or not, the interviewer should take notes to keep track of key aspects of the discussion. However, the interviewer should not focus on note taking to the extent of paying too little attention to the interviewee. One way of avoiding this problem is to enlist a second person to take notes while the interviewer asks the questions and listens attentively to the answers. If the interview is not

taped, the interviewer (or note-taker) should write up the notes immediately after the interview with the conversation still fresh in the mind. Despite the care exercised, it is always impossible to avoid making mistakes in this process, which is one reason why the text should be checked by the mediator before being more widely circulated.

If an interview is being recorded, mediators should be told that the machine can be turned off if they wish to speak off the record.

In such cases, explains Connie Peck, “the off-the-record remarks should not be used in a written report, but they can still provide valuable insight into the mediation process for the interviewer him or herself.”

Determine an Appropriate Level of Confidentiality

Interviewers—or the organization for which they are working—and mediators must determine the level of access control (i.e., the degree of confidentiality surrounding the results of the interview) in advance of the interview. The level of access control is generally much higher during a peace process than afterwards, as any public leak could jeopardize ongoing negotiations. In addition, divulged information sometimes has the potential of endangering the parties or the mediators. If a report of an interview, for example, explains how the parties compromised on certain positions, their political constituencies might turn against them for having given away too much too readily. A mediator’s reputation also depends to a large extent on his or her ability to keep confidential information truly confidential. If a mediator loses this reputation, his or her career could come to an abrupt end (as could the interviewer’s job!). Organizations, too, are concerned about preserving their reputations and would not want their mediators to disclose any embarrassing information to an interviewer.

There are at least four levels of access control. At the first and highest level, nothing is written, for as soon as something is written, it is very hard to guarantee absolute confidentiality. Mediators will generally refrain from mentioning names or events that could endanger anyone. During an interview, mediators may specifically ask the interviewer to stop taking notes if they are about to mention highly sensitive information. Such requests should be respected.

A written text *is* produced at the second level, but access to it is highly restricted, even within the organization. If there is need for such a highly

confidential written text, a written agreement should specify who will be allowed to read the text, and those people should sign a document that states that they will not pass on any information gained from reading it. Rather than run the risk of contravening such legally binding agreements, many organizations will not even contemplate producing a written text at this level of confidentiality.

At the third level of confidentiality (the level used for most mediator interviews), access to a written record is limited to the organization mandating the methodological debriefing. Texts should be clearly marked as being for internal use only. If they leak out, the details they contain would be unlikely to put anyone in political or physical danger, but they are not written in a style appropriate for the public domain. Indeed, were they intended for public consumption, the content of the interview would likely change because the mediator would be less willing to be self-critical.

At the fourth level of access control, reports and working papers may be circulated to selected target publics (e.g., participants of a mediation training workshop) and quoted by them, but only with the express approval of the institution or author. Beyond the fourth level lies total access, with anyone able to view the text of an interview or a published report based on an interview.

Arrange More Than One Meeting

A key to trust building is time. If the interviewer can arrange more than one meeting with the mediator, the chances of obtaining richer insights increase greatly.

“The best interview will always be the second one,” notes Harriet Martin, “when the mediator knows and trusts you, and when you have both had a chance to reflect on the issues. Your questions will be better a second time around, and so will their answers. For example, during a long second interview with Alvaro de Soto he told me about the final meeting of the Cyprus negotiation in 2004, not with the coldness of hindsight but how it actually felt at the time. He talked about the triumph of having finally got the foreign ministers of Greece and Turkey and the leaders of the north and the south of the island together around the same table for dinner. ‘It was convivial and everyone was delighted with that evening,’ he said. ‘It was a great success.’ As it turned out, it wasn’t actually. Cypriot president

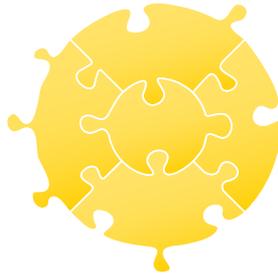
Papadopoulos was not talking to de Soto and was about to, in effect, walk out. But de Soto's understandable sense of triumph for having achieved that historical meeting at that moment might have clouded his capacity to see the depth of the impending crisis. Papadopoulos' contempt for de Soto's UN plan became all too clear as he started his successful campaign to have his people reject it at referendum."

Determine the Venue and Timing

Two often-neglected aspects of a successful interview are its timing and its location.

Antje Herrberg from CMI contends that "it is good to schedule an interview at the end of the day. This way the mediator is less stressed and disturbed by any pressing issues and deadlines. The venue must also be considered carefully. In my experience, a perfect setting is in the mediator's home or—if this is not possible—any other neutral and quiet location distant from the mediator's office. The setting must be apt for self reflection."

Different lessons will be gathered by carrying out the interview soon after the mediation in contrast to months or years after the assignment. More details will surface in the former instance, while more reflective analysis may come out of the latter.



STEP 2

Conduct the Interview

Once an interviewer's preparations have been completed, he or she is ready to begin the interview. This chapter examines various aspects of the interview process, including the style adopted and the logic behind various types of questions.

The Interview Process

Understand and Explain the Process

Like all interviews, an interview with a mediator can be divided into phases: the introduction, the main phase, and the wrap-up. The aim of the introductory phase is to build rapport, clarify the aim of the interview and the time period on which it will focus, and explain how the material collected will be used, processed, and disseminated. The main phase, which is by far the longest, consists of the mediator answering a series of questions, some of which have been prepared in advance by the interviewer, but most of which are shaped by the mediator's responses as the interview proceeds, with dead ends ignored and productive avenues of inquiry explored. During the wrap-up phase, the interviewer should mention the next steps, such as how the report will be written, reviewed, and disseminated.

Don't Come with a Long List of Questions

An effective interviewing style is exploratory and semi-structured.⁵ An interviewer should arrive at the interview with a set of both broad and specific questions. Generally, just three to five broad questions, often ones that the interviewer can learn by heart, are sufficient. Within each of those broad areas, the interviewer can also prepare a series of detailed follow-up

questions, but many of these will not be used because they will not fit the flow of the conversation. The questions should be designed to elicit the mediator's thoughts on key issues, but the interviewer should also allow time and space within the interview to ask new questions that occur during the course of the conversation. In fact, the best lessons normally come in response to questions that pop up during the interview process. Put differently, the best way to stifle an explorative interview is to have a long list of questions and to stick to them blindly, ticking them off one by one. *"Pulling your follow-up questions out of their answers, rather than from a piece of paper in front you, helps deepen the material you will get from them,"* observes Harriet Martin. *"It shows you are on their wavelength. You just might need to direct your questions in a particular way to cover the issues you want an answer to. So have in your head the three or four key areas you need to cover before you start."*

Encourage the Mediator to Talk Freely

Three techniques are especially effective in encouraging the mediator to speak freely: displaying curiosity, asking open and hypothetical questions, and using solution-oriented questioning.

Display Curiosity. An open-minded, inquisitive attitude on the part of the interviewer is crucial for a successful interview. If mediators feel that the interviewer is eager to learn from them, they are generally keen to share what they have learned.

As Connie Peck comments, "Since mediators may have devoted months or years of their lives to mediation processes and rarely have an opportunity to discuss this with anyone, they often enjoy the opportunity to talk about their experience of mediation. If the interviewer is genuinely interested in mediation theory and practice, the mediator may be led to recall the strategies and tactics used throughout the process."

If, however, mediators feel that they are being criticized or evaluated, they will likely become defensive and will share only generalized aspects of their experiences that are often already well known. Interviewers should continually ask themselves what they can learn from the mediator, what is new in the mediator's experience and perspective, and how does the mediator echo or contradict what other mediators have said. Depending on what answers such questions generate, the mediator should then dig

down in a certain direction to unearth more interesting—and perhaps surprising—insights.

Ask Open and Hypothetical Questions. “Open questions” (questions that generally begin with “what,” “when,” “who,” “why,” and “how”) give the mediator space to answer and explore new aspects of how the peace process unfolded. “Hypothetical questions” (e.g., “If you had the chance to mediate again, what would you do differently?” “If you were the conflict party in that situation, what would you have liked the mediator to do?”) can also elicit thoughtful and expansive answers. By contrast, closed questions (questions starting with a verb, “Did you...,” “Was it...,” “Have you been...”) leave little space for the respondent to answer. They produce yes/no answers, and while they may help to verify points, they do not stimulate explorative responses. Similar to closed questions, leading questions also leave the respondent little room to answer. Rather than giving the interviewee space, they generate expected answers (e.g., “I am sure in this situation, the only option you had was to end the process?” versus an open question such as “What other possible options were there given this situation?”).

In one case, an interviewer concluded from his background reading that the events of 9/11 had been the key factor that had brought the parties to the table, and thus used a leading question by asking the mediator, “So 9/11 was the key factor that changed the context and brought the parties to the table?” The mediator’s reaction, however, betrayed his opinion that that there were many other much worse catastrophes than 9/11 and his exasperation with the West’s obsession with 9/11. The interviewer realized that an open question (e.g., “What were the main factors that brought the parties to the table?” “What role did 9/11 play?”) would have been more productive both in terms of the information gained and in terms of building rapport.

Halfway between open questions (“What was the form of participation at the talks?”) and closed questions (“Did you use a separate consultation forum?”) are “choice questions.” These are useful if the interviewer wants to verify a particular point, limiting the freedom of an open question while also giving the mediator more space to answer than a closed question provides. An example could be: “Did you use separate consultation forums or widen the participation at the table through larger delegations?”

When asking open questions, the course of a debriefing session might change as the conversation develops.

Antje Herrberg notes that “sometimes mediators want to spend a lot of time talking about one very particular issue of a specific conflict. Even though this might not be part of the original plan, I let the interviewee vent and I do not interrupt—that’s the difference between a debriefing and a journalistic interview: the journalist would simply press hard to get the main questions answered. Debriefing is like a journey for me. I simply know the general signposts and I am ready to explore the little niches that I have not seen before I started the journey. It is usually a very rewarding experience for both, the mediator and the interviewer.”

Use Solution-Oriented Questioning. Most questions can be phrased either negatively (“Is the glass half empty?”) or positively (“Is the glass half full?”). The way in which the question is phrased, however, can influence the type of answer given. Negative, deficit-oriented questions seek out weaknesses and mistakes (e.g., “What went wrong?” “What was your greatest mistake?” “How did mediator competition hurt the process?”). Solution-oriented questions mobilize emotional resources and help to discover positive aspects (e.g., “What were the highlights?” “How did you overcome challenges?” “What helped improve coordination among mediators?”). Negative-oriented questions should not be avoided completely for the simple reason that much can be learned from mistakes. When used, negative questions should be asked after a set of positive questions and should be tactfully phrased (e.g., “With hindsight, is there anything you would have done differently, and if so, what would that have been?” rather than “What were your greatest mistakes?”). For the most part, however, interviewers should use positive, solution-oriented questions because they motivate the mediator, and the chief purpose of an interview is not just to identify problems but to discover how to overcome challenges.

Zero In on Sensitive Issues, but Do So Carefully

During most, if not all interviews, the interviewer will discover that some issues are difficult to clarify and that some of the mediator’s responses are contradictory. When an interviewer feels there is a contradiction in the air, it is a good sign that something interesting can be discovered. In such situations, the interviewer should zoom in on the issue at question, using hypothetical, leading, closed, or very precise questions. These questions

are best posed later in an interview, when the interviewer has acquired the overall picture and when trust between the mediator and the interviewer has deepened. If the mediator gives an evasive answer, the interviewer should back off for the moment, but then pick up the sensitive issue later, from a different angle, slowly circling toward the key point. However, it is also important to respect no-go zones, to recognize that the mediator may be resistant to any attempt to explore particularly sensitive subjects.

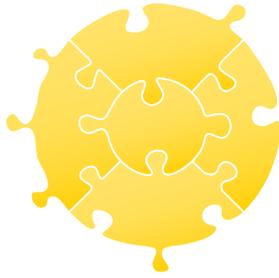
Nita Yawandarajah sees decision-making as an area where it is especially important to probe. “Knowledge is created at moments when one is faced by a challenge, when a decision has to be taken, or a solution found to overcome the challenge. That is why people say ‘necessity is the mother of invention.’ This ‘new’ knowledge is generally a combination of old knowledge and intuition that is adapted to the given situation. First of all, just let the mediator tell his or her story. They need to be able to talk freely, without too many interruptions. Then focus on moments when decisions were made: what they did, why they did it, and how they did it. As an interviewer, focus on challenges and moments of decision-making. Key questions to determine the strategy are (1) what did you do? and (2) why did you do that? To identify the tactics used, ask (3) how did you do it? The ‘why’ question is the most interesting, and also the most hard to get at. But it provides the clues to the factors that were context specific that allowed the decision to be made or the solution to work. These context specific factors are important to identify as it allows one to know in what types of situations that decision/solution would work.”⁶

Mediators may also be sensitive, at least at first, to discussing moral dilemmas posed by their work—the kind of dilemma that often occurs when high moral aspirations and realpolitik clash.

Harriet Martin interviewed Norwegian mediators who had sought to bring the Tamil Tigers into the Sri Lankan peace process. She spent a week traveling with the Norwegians during one of their many trips to Sri Lanka in 2004. “Like anyone you are interviewing, spending time with them, seeing how they work and understanding the pressures they are under, all help when it comes to getting them to open up. They are much more likely to be more honest with you if you can demonstrate some sympathy for and understanding of the difficulty of the task that they face.”

Examples of Mediation Question Guidelines

The appendices at the end of this handbook illustrate the kind of templates devised by different organizations that can be useful to an interviewer in choosing the kinds of questions he or she might want to ask. They can be helpful to an interviewer by identifying key aspects of the craft of mediation that an interviewer might want the mediator to discuss. These appendices should be treated as sources of inspiration, as reminders of subjects to cover, as useful checklists of potential topics for discussion. They should certainly not be followed slavishly, because each interview should be tailored to the mediator being interviewed, to the circumstances in which he or she worked, and to the interests of the organization commissioning the interview.



STEP 3

Structure and Analyze the Experience

Once the interview has been conducted, the next step in debriefing a mediator is to structure, analyze, and digest the case—and check back with the mediator for accuracy. Usually the interviewer does this, as he or she is most familiar with the material. Other people who know the case or the mediation methodology, typically from within the same organization, may help the interviewer fine-tune the document and sharpen the analysis. A write-up of the rough interview notes and initial structuring of the material after the first interview helps to highlight gaps that have to be filled in a second or third interview. The decision when to show the write-up of the interview to the mediator to check for accuracy depends on the sensitivity of the material and quality of the product. The better edited the draft given to the mediator, the more respect it shows for the mediator's time.

The debriefing document need not be the only document that analyzes the mediator's experience. Some organizations and interviewers encourage mediators to pick up a pen or keyboard.

As Connie Peck notes: "Since lessons learned from mediation are so valuable to the development of mediation theory and practice, interviewers may also wish to encourage mediators to write their own accounts of their mediation experience for publication (either as a book or article). In some cases, they may be reluctant to do so, but several mediators have written accounts of their experience and these provide valuable insight for those interested in developing mediation theory and practice."⁷

Structure the Text

Structuring the text is the first step of analysis. The structure should be tailored to suit the target audience as well as the length and format of the final document. The interviewer has to be aware of which details mentioned by the mediator are pivotal and which are relatively unimportant, and should organize the text to highlight the former. The interviewer should also strive to ensure that as the reader proceeds through the text, the logic of the mediation process becomes apparent. Diagrams or other graphics can often help the reader visualize key aspects of the mediation.

The interviewer can select from at least three basic structures. Most people instinctively opt for a *chronological structure* that mirrors the course of the mediation. The text starts by describing how the mediator became engaged in the peace process, explores how he or she mediated the case, and concludes by examining how the mediator exited the process. An *external structure*—i.e., a structure that mirrors an external framework, such as one of the questionnaire templates presented in the appendices to this handbook—is useful if one is comparing more than one case (see below, “Learn from Comparisons”). The third approach, the use of an *internal structure*, is often the most elegant and natural structure, but also perhaps the hardest to discover. The contours of an internal structure can emerge during the interview itself or during the process of analyzing the interview, when key aspects of or patterns within the specific mediation experience become clear.

Analyze the Text

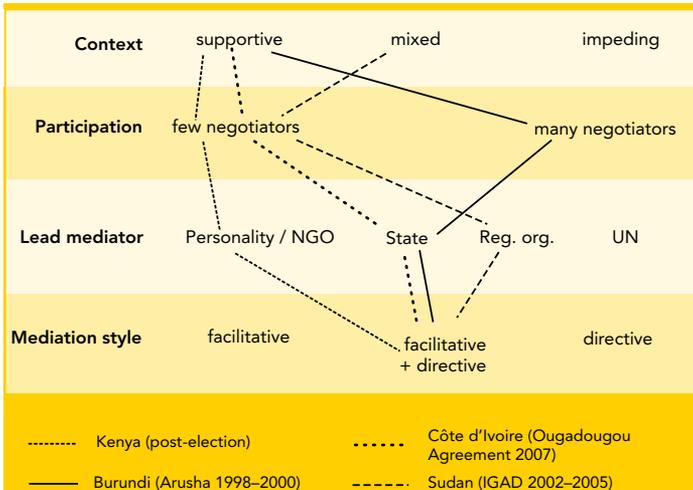
An effective structure is the first stage of analysis, as it clusters and orders various issues. Analysis entails more than structure however. It also involves recognizing the links between various issues and drawing out lessons learned from the material at hand. The danger in writing up an interview is that one remains on the descriptive level (describing what the mediator did) and does not venture into the analytical level (exploring why the mediator took the actions he or she did, how various issues are related to each other, and how the context influenced the nature and effects of those actions). Another danger is that while the interviewer may explore cause and effect within the context of the specific case, the interviewer may fail to analyze the case in relation to the mediation

criteria of the organization, in relation to other cases, or in relation to mediation theory and best practice.

Learn from Comparisons

Transferable lessons often become apparent when one compares different cases, especially if one employs the same external structure for reporting each case. For example, the interviewer might cluster all the cases in which mediation was used during a specific phase of the peace process (e.g., the post-agreement phase), or in which a particular track was emphasized (e.g., a Track-II or multitrack approach), or in which the mediator dealt with a particular type of actor (e.g., armed nonstate actors). Common patterns can also become evident if similar facets of multiple cases are mapped graphically. For instance, figure 2 depicts a mediation profile that distills four dimensions of four African mediation cases and highlights key similarities and differences.

Figure 2. Graphic Comparison of Mediation Processes



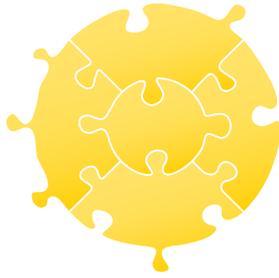
Source: Based on the analysis in Annika Aberg, Sabina Laederach, David Lanz, Simon J. A. Mason, and Damiano Sguaitamatti, *Unpacking the Mystery of Mediation in African Peace Processes* (Bern, Zurich: Mediation Support Project, Center for Security Studies, swisspeace, 2008), www.css.ethz.ch/publications/Mediation_in_Africa_full.pdf.

Digest the Lessons

The interface between analyzing mediation experience and disseminating lessons is fluid.

The Swiss FDFA, for example, systematically debriefed their mediators and prepared summaries based on those debriefings as background reading for a workshop on mediation. At the workshop, the mediators spoke of their experiences and offered some insights that were not mentioned in the written summaries. Questions from the workshop participants—who already had read the case summaries—also brought new aspects to light. Some of these insights were then integrated into the summaries when they were updated.

This example illustrates how the actual debriefing of mediators in an interview setting, and the development of a document based on the interview should not be seen in isolation from other forms of learning and other ways of passing on mediation experience. The process of digesting mediation lessons is similar to a cow chewing her cud: lessons have to be chewed over, left alone, chewed over again, and so forth.



STEP 4

Disseminate the Knowledge Acquired

Ideally, the task of disseminating the knowledge acquired from the process of debriefing a mediator is a joint endeavor, involving the mediator, the interviewer, and the staff of the organization supporting the interviewer or mediator. The mediator, for example, might elaborate upon the insights developed during the interview at workshops and conferences. The interviewer's role could continue well beyond preparing a report and involve, for instance, recruiting former interviewees to participate in a training program for mediators. The desk officer who supported the interviewer in the analysis of the case might come across a similar challenge in another case she or he is dealing with, and might introduce the two mediators to one another to exchange ideas. The person in charge of the mediator's division might develop the division's goals and policies in light of the lessons unearthed by the debriefing process.

In short, the opportunities for dissemination are numerous and varied, and they certainly need not involve the document that distills the results of an interview. Even so, that document can be a valuable learning tool if it reaches the right audience.

Identify Target Audiences and Shape the Document Accordingly

Possible target audiences for some version of the debriefing document include:

- other mediators and related staff (desk officers, managers) within the organization sponsoring the debriefing

- politicians and officials developing the policy frameworks for mediation engagements
- a wider, professional mediator and mediation support community
- conflict parties and negotiators who will be in contact with mediators
- students and researchers in peace and conflict studies
- a wider public interested in mediation and peace work.

The basic debriefing document will often have to be adapted to suit a particular audience, not least because of considerations regarding access control.

The style of the document, and the manner in which it is distributed, should also be shaped by the nature of the target audience. Scholarly audiences, for instance, will welcome an analytical, dispassionate tone, and publication in an academic journal. For practitioners, however, free online publication is desirable because they tend to have less access to academic journals than students and researchers. For practitioners, a literature overview of the wider academic debate may be unnecessary and uninteresting, yet the short and precise conceptual style of academic papers may be more welcome than the more prolix story-telling approach. For the wider public, however, a story-telling approach will be better received than a more thematic structure and a drier, more precise style.

Even so, all audiences appreciate readability.

As Nita Yawanarajah points out: “When you have done your interviews and analyzed your material, make sure you use slogans, proverbs, easy catch phrases to communicate your lessons. In Dojo philosophy, the master says that ‘a warrior learns through slogans.’ This is true in any learning process—if not, no one remembers the lesson. There must be an emotional anchor or story that can be visualized in the process of learning, not just rational, cognitive concepts. Examples are ‘When elephants fight, the grass gets trampled,’ ‘Talking is silver, listening is gold,’ and ‘Listen with your heart, not with your ears.’”

Gabriele Seils demonstrates how the Q&A style that was used during the interview to collect material can also be used to present key lessons from the interviews in a lively, readable style: “The way the book is now, is different from the original interview material. Apart from the mediator’s—in this case

Marshall Rosenberg's—own dramaturgy of combining practical examples with stories of his work and life, I did the main structuring after the interviews. I took the original material, which was about twice as much as ended up in the final book, and broke it into many pieces, some bigger ones and some smaller ones and then put them together again after I had found the basic themes, which are represented in the different chapters. So it did not organically grow that way, it was rather artificially constructed. I did this in order to condense the huge amount of material I had, and come out with a reader-friendly way of introducing people to this specific mediator's work and spirit." Her book is also a striking example of how to preserve the original voice of the mediator while making the mediator's reflections easy to read and grasp.⁸

Turn the Lessons into "Hot" Knowledge

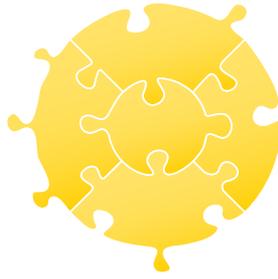
The key role of the debriefing document is to make sure that lessons and insights discovered during the interview are not lost over time and space. The insights are captured in the document ready at any time to be translated into practice. But how that translation is effected will influence how the content of the document is received. The lessons offered by the mediator during the "hot" interview have been distilled into the "cold" artifact of a written report, and those lessons will make a deeper impression on audiences if they are turned back into a "hot" form of knowledge. This can be best accomplished by linking the debriefing document to a face-to-face activity. For instance, the document could be used as a preparatory reader for a parliamentary consultation or a public or in-house workshop on mediation.

For an audience of practitioners, the following tools are particularly useful for enhancing the internalization and dissemination of mediation knowledge derived from the debriefing process.

- *Communities of Practice (CoP):* These communities have been defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis."⁹ A group of mediators exchanging ideas, experiences, and opinions via the Internet about a specific conflict or type of mediation can be a powerful learning system. If the material developed from debriefing mediators is fed into a "Mediation CoP," learning from and analysis of the various cases continues. However,

experience shows that virtual communities tend to lack vitality if they never involve face-to-face contact, and thus online CoPs should strive to bring their members together for meetings from time to time.

- *Peer Assist and Intervention*¹⁰: Peer assist involves joint learning within a team of peers or between two teams of peers. For instance, when a peace process enters a new phase and new mediators begin work, those mediators might ask another team of mediators working on a different but similar case to help identify possible solutions to the problem they are facing. Intervention is similar but focuses on an individual mediator, who presents her or his case to another group of mediators, who in turn offer feedback and suggestions on how to deal with the challenge the mediator is facing at the time. The documents generated by interviews can be useful in the process of peer assist and intervention by helping to identify mediators with the kind of experience that would make their advice particularly valuable.
- *Coaching and Mentoring*: Coaching (or supervision) and mentoring involve a more experienced mediator guiding a less experienced mediator by giving advice and suggestions. In most cases, the more experienced mediator does not actually take part in the mediation. The coaching usually occurs before or after the mediation, in a face-to-face setting or by email or during telephone conversations. In the case of mentoring, this is a long-term process that continues beyond a single case. The debriefing document offers a snapshot of where the mediator is, and subsequent interviews and reports can thus document the development of the mediator over a period of time.¹¹
- *Workshops, Trainings, and Seminars*: The debriefing documents can be used in various ways in workshops and other short-term educational forums. For example, it can be an excellent source of material when developing role plays, which are a valuable and popular tool for learning about negotiation and mediation.



Conclusion

At first blush, it may seem a relatively easy task to interview mediators to learn from them, to generate knowledge, and to capture lessons learned. During media interviews, mediators may worry that they will be lured into disclosing an entertaining but politically sensitive anecdote; and during donor interviews, mediators may be apprehensive in case something they say endangers continued funding. But in the kind of interview that is the subject of this handbook, the mediator is likely to be happy to tell his or her story and the interviewer to be happy to listen and learn. Indeed, in almost all cases, the atmosphere during such interviews is comfortable for both participants.

On closer examination, however, learning from mediators is not so straightforward. The conversation is much more than a fireside chat. Questions of mandate, confidentiality, and the purpose of the interview must be clarified before beginning. The interviewer has to be well prepared and must strike a delicate balance between having a clear idea of the key questions to ask, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, being flexible and open to discover unexpected insights. The interviewer guides the mediator, but the mediator also guides the interviewer. Once the interview is finished, the work continues. Value is created by analyzing and structuring the material from the interview. One has to check what one has written with the mediator. Furthermore, once various cases have been analyzed on an individual basis, comparative analysis is important to identify those aspects that are unique and those that are generic. Finally, the mediation knowledge created has to be passed on in learning environments (workshops, seminars, and so forth) as a first step to getting the lessons translated back into real-life practice.

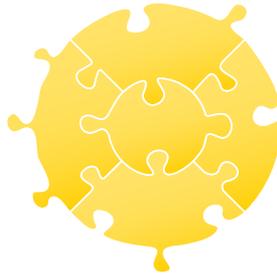
Setting up a mediation knowledge management system is a long-term investment in increasing the quality of mediation practice. Debriefing

mediators (especially mid-level mediators) can also lead to a more realistic view of mediation. The iconic handshake between political leaders who have just signed an agreement to end their conflict may enjoy the limelight of media attention, but it is only a symbol of the unpublicized and unseen efforts made by hundreds of mediators and peacebuilding practitioners, often stretching over decades. Debriefing these mediators to learn from their experiences sheds light on these hidden experiences—experiences that may be less spectacular than what the media reports, but that are no less significant to the achievement of peace.

Notes

1. For this form of self-assessment, see the questions on the UN Peacemaker home page (www.un.org/peacemaker) under the section “Managing a Peace Process.”
2. The Mediation Support Project is a joint venture between the Swiss Peace Foundation (swisspeace) and the Center for Security Studies at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich) and is funded by the Swiss FDFA. For more information, see www.css.ethz.ch and www.swisspeace.ch/mediation.
3. This was highlighted by Laurie Nathan regarding the Darfur peace process (comments made during the Peace Mediation Course run by the Swiss FDFA, Schloss Hünigen, Switzerland, March 16, 2009).
4. The results of Harriet Martin’s debriefing of mediators is presented in her book, *Kings of Peace, Pawns of War: The Untold Story of Peace-making* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).
5. For more information on how to use this interviewing style, see section 3.1 (pp. 41–59) in “Conflict-Sensitive Interviewing” in Simon J. A. Mason, *From Conflict to Cooperation in the Nile Basin*, (Zurich: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2004), <http://e-collection.ethbib.ethz.ch/eserv/eth:27328/eth-27328-02.pdf>.
6. Nita Yawanarajah used principles of knowledge management articulated by authors such as David Snowden, Ikujiro Nonaka, and Hirotaka Takeuchi when developing the UN Peacemaker Web site.
7. See, for example, the articles by “insider mediators” Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Franklin Quijano, Léonidas Nijimbere, and Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, at www.berghof-peacesupport.org/mediation_negotiation.htm. Other examples include the book by the senior mediator in the Northern Irish process, George J. Mitchell, *Making Peace* (New York: Random House, 1999); and the study by Lt. General Sumbeiywo, *To Be a Negotiator: Strategies and Tactics* (Zurich, Bern: Mediation Support Project, Center for Security Studies, swisspeace, 2009), www.css.ethz.ch/box_feeder/negotiator.pdf.
8. Marshall Rosenberg, *Konflikte Lösen durch gewaltfreie Kommunikation: Ein Gespräch mit Gabriele Seils* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004). An English-language version is forthcoming.
9. Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2002). For more information on how to set up CoPs, see www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm.

10. For more details on how to organize peer assist and intervision, see Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell, *Learning to Fly. Practical Knowledge Management from Leading and Learning Organizations* (Chichester, UK: Capstone Publishing Limited, 2001).
11. For more details on these instruments, see Canadian International Development Agency, *Knowledge Sharing: Methods, Meetings and Tools* (Ottawa: CIDA), pp. 8ff, www.km4dev.org/.



Appendices

Appendix 1

Mediation Lessons Template of the Swiss FDFA

Source: Mediation Support Project (Center for Security Studies—ETH Zurich/swisspeace) and the Swiss FDFA

This template is useful in creating a broad overview of how mediation was used in a specific phase of a peace process. The Swiss FDFA uses this template to summarize all cases in which its mediators and experts were involved. Each summary is limited to four pages. In a peace process in which more than one engagement took place, a four-page summary is prepared for each engagement. Overall lessons for peace mediations are drawn up by comparing the various summaries. Some cases are also analyzed in more depth. Mediators are usually debriefed upon the completion of a process or at key turning points during the process. If the latter is the case, the four-page summary is updated later, when the mediator reaches another turning point or exits the process. The debriefing activity is an open-ended process, whereby new mediation engagements are continuously analyzed.

Name and Reference of the Case: X

Details of the Swiss Actor/Mediator: X

Duration of Engagement: X

Other Parties: X

Follow-up: X

Type	Phase	Swiss Involvement	Track
Mediation	Pre-agreement	Lead	Track 1
Facilitation	Agreement	Direct	Track 1.5
Expertise	Implementation	Funding only	Track 2

Key lessons learned:

- X
- X

Background of the conflict:

(Conflict history, actors, issues, context)

- How did the conflict develop historically?
- Who are key actors involved in the conflict?
- What are the issues of the conflict?
- What are context factors affecting the conflict (e.g., geopolitical factors, interests of regional or global powers)?

Entry points that led to the engagement:

(Contacts, form of request, motivation, who has the lead, who were partners, length of engagement, aim/mandate, decision-making process)

- What kind of contacts, networks led to the request?
- How was the organization sending the mediator asked for help?
- What was the organization's motivation for getting involved, what was the personal motivation of the mediator?
- Who was the lead, chief mediator in the peace process?
- Who were additional partners, further third parties?
- How long was the mediation engagement?

- What was the mandate, what was expected of the mediator, what was the aim of the mediation process?
- How was the decision taken to send the mediator?

How the engagement was implemented:

(Process, delicate points, success/failure factors, third-party coordination, gender-sensitivity, actors involved, inclusiveness of conflict parties and their constituencies)

- How did the process evolve, what phases can be identified?
- What were delicate points?
- What were success factors, where were failure factors?
- How were the various third parties coordinated?
- How gender sensitive was the approach?
- Who was involved on the side of the conflict parties, how inclusive were the talks, how was this achieved?

Outcome, evaluation, follow-up:

(Outcome, impact, what could/should be done differently, perception of the engagement by the conflict parties, added value of Swiss engagement, visibility, follow-up)

- What was the outcome of the mediation?
- What was the longer term impact?
- With hindsight, what could and should have been done differently?
- How did the conflict parties perceive the mediation?
- What was the added value of the Swiss FDFA engagement?
- What visibility was achieved for the organization sending the mediator?
- What follow-up steps were taken?

Contact (mediator interviewed):

Date of Assessment (or update):

Documented by (person interviewing):

Appendix 2

UN Peacemaker Case Debriefing Template

Source: UN Peacemaker Web site, www.un.org/peacemaker (password protected, but free access); direct link: http://peacemaker.unlb.org/doc_view.php?d=937.

The UN template was designed by the Mediation Support Unit for self-assessment of mediators. The full version of the template—which includes many detailed questions—is available on the UN Peacemaker Web site. Only the headings are shown here, to give an idea of the topics covered.

Part I: Brief History of the Conflict

Part II: UN Involvement in Peacemaking

- Entry points for peacemaking
- Sources of mandate
- Types of good offices mandate
- Factors that influence the mandate

Part III: Managing a Peace Process

- Preparing for peacemaking
- Mediating
- Using leverage and influential actors
- Working with peacemaking partners
- Dealing with spoilers
- Dealing with deadlock

Part IV: Peace Agreements

- Agreements that facilitate implementation
- Agreements that promote sustainable peace

Part V: Observations

Part VI: Key Lessons

Appendix 3

Analyzing an Agreement: FWEE and FICSS

Sources: L. Susskind and J. Cruickshank, *Breaking the Impasse: Consensual Approaches to Resolving Public Disputes* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); and Ben Hoffman Peace Concorde Inc. and the Canadian International Institute for Applied Negotiations.

While most questions that an interviewer poses to a mediator focus on the mediation process and method, the interviewer may also ask about the peace agreement—if any—that results from the mediation process. Such inquiries help to put the method and process in relation to the outcome (i.e., the peace agreement). One way of analyzing an agreement is along the dimensions Fair/Wise/Efficient/Endurable (FWEE), which were originally developed by L. Susskind and J. Cruickshank and then further refined by various mediators such as Ben Hoffman. Another analytical model—developed by the Mediation Support Project and drawing on the FWEE model—explores the dimensions Fairness/Inclusiveness/Creativity/Specificity/Simplicity (FICSS).

The FWEE model consists of four dimensions:

- **Fairness** between the parties involved, which is often limited by the actual power balance between the parties. Do the parties view the agreement as fair?
- **Wise** refers to how the agreement is likely to be seen in retrospect. Were key points addressed? Are some issues that were not addressed likely to arise in the future?
- **Efficient** refers to the transaction costs that went into reaching the agreement, as well as the “richness” of substance that the parties extracted from the situation and then put into the agreement. Was the agreement process efficient? Did the parties extract as much as they could from it?
- **Enduring** refers to the extent to which the agreement can be implemented. Will it last? Does it clearly explain who does what, when, and how?

The FICSS model (memory hook, “the agreement should be a good FICSS [fix] for the conflict”) consist of five dimensions:

- **Fairness** between the parties involved, which is often limited by the actual power balance between the parties. Do the parties view the agreement as fair?
- **Inclusiveness** of topics and parties is essential if an agreement is to endure. It is impossible, however, to have all parties sitting at the bargaining table, and the mediator should therefore aim for sufficient rather than comprehensive inclusiveness. Is the agreement inclusive of key topics and parties?
- **Creativeness** in the development of new ideas. Is the agreement tailored to the situation at hand, or is it put together by cutting and pasting elements of other peace agreements?
- **Specificity** of the agreement with regards to the implementation phase. Many agreements fail because of a lack of clarity about implementation. Does the agreement clearly and precisely define who will do what, when, and how?
- **Simplicity** of the agreement with regards to the implementation phase. The more specific the agreement, the better—unless the agreement is too complicated. Is the agreement well tailored to the situation? Is it simple enough to implement? To what extent have future transaction costs between the conflict parties been minimized?

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About the MSP, CSS, and swisspeace

The Mediation Support Project (MSP) was founded in 2005 as a joint venture between the Swiss Peace Foundation (swisspeace) and the Center for Security Studies at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich). The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is the initiator and main partner of MSP. MSP supports mediators and conflict parties in gaining knowledge and skills for effective peace negotiations.

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich) is a Swiss academic center of competence that specializes in research, training, and information services in the field of international relations and security policy. The CSS also acts as a consultant to various political bodies and the general public. The CSS engages in research projects with a number of Swiss and international partners, focusing on new risks; European and transatlantic security, strategy, and doctrine; state failure and state building; and Swiss foreign and security policy. The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network and in cooperation with partner institutes manages the Crisis and Risk Network, the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network, and the Russian and Eurasian Security Network. The CSS is a member of the Center for Comparative and International Studies, which is a joint initiative between the ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich. Its Web site is www.css.ethz.ch.

The Swiss Peace Foundation (swisspeace) is a practice-oriented peace research institute in the area of conflict analysis and peacebuilding. Founded in 1988 as the Swiss Peace Foundation with the goal of promoting independent peace research in Switzerland, swisspeace today has thirty staff members and researches the causes of wars and violent conflicts, develops tools for early recognition of tensions, and formulates conflict mitigation and peacebuilding strategies. Swisspeace also contributes to information exchange and networking on current issues of peace and security policy through its analyses and reports as well as meetings and conferences. Its most important clients are the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss National Science Foundation, as well as national and international organizations and foundations. Its Web site is www.swisspeace.ch.

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