

MANUAL ON
Social Mediation
for Social Transitions

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SUMMARY

This Manual serves as a reference text for individuals wishing to engage in the practice of Social Mediation. It provides useful information and guidance for those wishing to apply this practice with the aim of preventing, de-escalating, or resolving social disputes. More specifically, the practice is applicable both as a direct tool to the resolution of non-formal, small-scale, community conflicts, or as a complementary mechanism in assisting larger-scale political or legal conflicts.

The Manual includes best practices for social mediators, theoretical underpinnings and research findings on the practice of conflict resolution through Social Mediation, as well as advice on effective communication and dialogue facilitation.

The development of this Manual was undertaken by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Law, Alternative and Innovative Methods (ICLAIM), in partnership with UCLan Cyprus and with the support of the Centre for Sustainable Transitions and the University of Central Lancashire UK.

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FOREWORD

It is a real pleasure to write the Foreword for the second ICLAIM Manual on Social Mediation, this time focusing on Social Transitions. ICLAIM is a young non-profit social enterprise whose primary objective is to serve groups & communities in need on the ground. It benefits from the interdisciplinary expertise of a pool of resident experts, researchers and interns in law, conflict resolution, social work and ethics from diverse backgrounds. The organisation envisions a society where citizens are empowered and enjoy access to social justice, through alternative and innovative approaches in the application of the law to societal issues.

Since 2018, ICLAIM has increasingly used Social Mediation as a soft tool which places individuals and communities across the world at the forefront of socio-economic inclusion in turbulent times. It has been aided by the University of Central Lancashire in Cyprus and in the UK in its endeavours over the years. The Social Mediation programme uses concepts around groups and transitions and has proposed concrete solutions to the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic which divide people in renewed ways. Social Mediation can be used in dealing with complex and sensitive issues of identity, prejudice and exclusion, all exacerbated by the pandemic at the global level. It is an adaptive method, applicable in social and professional settings, empowering large, possibly diverse, groups of people to continue interacting regularly through modern technologies despite the pandemic. It offers participants a simple but robust way towards bridging broken or vulnerable social bonds, enhancing cohesion and finding solutions to socio-economic challenges in pandemic times. Across the pandemic, we have facilitated the identification and mitigation of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 by offering to groups/communities across the globe, divided physically/socially/economically by the pandemic, concrete tools to continue dialogue and empower adapted solutions to renew socio-economic inclusion.

The programme consists of renewable training workshops, accessible to all including remotely, promoting Social Mediation in different contexts of social tensions, complemented by an international Social Mediators' Network. Social Mediation is applicable in any socio-economic (including professional) context where big groups of people engage with each other on a regular basis, and there is a likelihood for

social tension to rise. The project took a new turn with COVID-19, helping participants to address concrete issues in their communities and tackle the urgent needs created by emergency measures, lockdowns, lack of physical mobility, unemployment, social exclusion, or poverty. The SDGs are expressly articulated in the trainings and deliverables, spreading good and sustainable practices. Workshops use a 'train-the-trainers' approach, with multiplier effects in communities across the globe. Trained members of the Network come from Africa, Asia and Europe. They are educators, national/international law enforcement & order officers, NGOs, professionals, youths. The 'Social Mediation in Practice' project has received the European Citizen Prize 2020 from the European Parliament for its cross-border promotion of European values and Social Mediation as a solution from Cyprus is being scaled up at the global level.²

The programme strengthens global governance by adapting Social Mediation to pandemic-impacted society. It presents a unique & innovative way of applying Mediation beyond traditional conflict resolution internationally, to address needs and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. The Social Mediation programme initially encouraged the participation of people from all ethnic or other communities of Cyprus, serving as a bridge across the decades-long ethnic division of communities, with varied participation of foreigners, at a truly intercommunal grass-root level. The project then grew to include global issues of social cohesion; its unique diversity is reflected in the members of the Network across 3 continents. The needs on the ground due to the pandemic, transformed the innovative aim of the programme as one of socio-economic cohesion across communities/societies where divides are now more visible than ever due to social distancing and renewed physical barriers. COVID-19 is impacting all countries around the world with physical/psychological/economic/social outcomes of the pandemic, with even more complex consequences in countries that have protracted disputes. The programme's desired impact is to empower innovative and renewed efforts towards socio-economic cohesion in affected communities and societies at large, through concrete solutions making a difference on the ground. The programme supports Social Mediators across the world to power solutions within their own communities, building capacity for faster implementation in troubled times.

The Social Mediation programme is delivered by ICLAIM with the support of the University of Central Lancashire in Cyprus (host institution) and in the UK (grant from the

University of Central Lancashire Institute of Citizenship, Society and Change and the Centre for Sustainable Transitions). The programme has also been supported by grants from the British High Commission in Nicosia. International Organisations such as the UN in Cyprus (UNFICYP) act as facilitators. We are happy to present solutions for incremental change at global governance international fora, for exposure to a wide variety of stakeholders to showcase results and advance our cause and to discuss alternative and innovative solutions in an interactive setting.

The Manual on Social Mediation in Social Transitions participates to these efforts.

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¹ For the full press release see: <https://www.uclancyprus.ac.cy/european-citizen-s-prize-2020-amp-2021-award-ceremony/>

² For more information see: <https://www.uclancyprus.ac.cy/iclaim-and-uclan-cyprus-are-joining-the-2022-global-solutions-forum-in-dubai-2/> and <https://www.globalsolutionsforum.org/>.

INTRODUCTION

Social Mediation is the form of mediation which seeks to deal with conflicts that affect social bonds and/or relationships. The definition presented by ICLAIM in the Handbook of Social Mediation, and adopted hereby, is the following:

*A process for creating and repairing social bonds, leading to peaceful resolutions of conflicts in daily life in which an impartial and independent party seeks, by organizing exchanges between persons and institutions, to help them to improve a relationship or to resolve a conflict opposing them.*³

In this sphere, it is a tool that can work to prevent, tackle and restore conflict and can impact persons on a micro (interpersonal), meso (group and community) and macro (societal) level. Hence, a number of separate approaches in the implementation of Social Mediation can be employed, in societies characterised by continuous social, political, economic, and technological transitions. Social Mediation is, therefore, a tool that can address situations of social conflict through a neutral lens, mobilising on the existence of the conflict for purposes of enhancing community ties.⁵

Social Mediation Objectives

- Articulate the primary reasons behind the conflict's escalation;
- Discuss underlying reasons, fears and insecurities that may exist in all parties and constitute a hotbed for conflict;
- Assist the parties involved to understand their position in the creation and escalation of the conflict;
- Consider ways in which such a conflict could have been prevented;
- Consider ways in which such a conflict does not occur again;
- Reach an agreement on how the parties wish to 'close' this chapter.

³ Jokinen, H. (2012, August 23-26). Social Mediation-Working towards inclusion from amidst exclusion. Proceedings of the 49th Societas Ethica Annual Conference 2012: Ethics and Migration, Lucian Blaga University Sibiu; Romania, No. 097,135-146 (p. 141-142). Linköping University Electronic Press.

⁴ ICLAIM. (2018). Handbook on Social Mediation in the Community: A Guide for Practitioners. https://www.iclaimcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/handbook_final.pdf; See also: <https://www.social-mediation.org/>

⁵ Ibid, Social Mediation Handbook

Our understanding of social transitions coincides with what in sociology is referred to as 'social change'. Sociologists have defined 'social change' in various ways, depending on the methodological background against which they studied the phenomenon, giving rise to different classifying theories of social change.⁶ Overall, social change involves 'change in the underlying structure of an institution, society or situation over a period of time,'⁷ through changes in economy, socio-cultural beliefs or communications, or political organisation.⁸ Adapting therefore to this context, 'social transitions' for the purposes of this manual, means crisis situations, which interrupt the usual social, political, economic or other structures within a given society.

During such transitions, whereas relationships are not ideal in any society, and major inequalities persist, actors within a specific society, more often than not, may develop a common understanding of social norms that sustain a level of social coherence. When unexpected changes occur, these often result in social hostility among specific groups or between individuals, calling for a 'transition' into a new, ideally more equitable, social reality, over a specific period of time. One such example has been the COVID-19 pandemic, which in 2020 reinforced the political polarisation and social uncertainty observed in the last decade, starting from the 2008 financial crisis, onwards.⁹

The present Manual is a follow up to previous work undertaken by ICLAIM on the issue of Social Mediation, starting with the 2018 publication of the Handbook on Social Mediation in the Community: A Guide for Practitioners.¹⁰ An initiative which aimed at introducing the Social Mediation conflict resolution methodology to professionals working with diverse group of persons, in the public or the private sector, including public servants, NGO staff and members, community workers, youth workers, teachers, non-formal trainers and educators. The publication of the Handbook was followed with a series of workshop-training session on 'Social Mediation in Practice' over the 2019-2020 academic year, and the establishment of a Social Mediators' Network, in September 2020.

⁶ Goodwin, R. (2009). *Changing Relations: Achieving Intimacy in a Time of Social Transition*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
Giddens, A. & Sutton, P.W. (2017). *Sociology* (8th ed.). Massachusetts: Polity press.

⁷ Ibid p. 124-127

⁸ Gozgor, G. (2021). The role of economic uncertainty in the rise of EU populism. *Public choice*, 1-18.

⁹ Hogg, M. A. (2021). Uncertain self in a changing world: A foundation for radicalisation, populism, and autocratic leadership. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 32(2), 235-268.

¹⁰ ICLAIM. (2018). *Handbook on Social Mediation in the Community: A Guide for Practitioners*. https://www.iclaimcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/handbook_final.pdf

Hence, the Social Mediation project is a work in progress, and a long-term project of ICLAIM, which the organisation is keen to adapt and expand into different directions, based on arising social needs and challenges. The Social Mediation project is compatible with UN Sustainable Development Goals:



Implemented through consecutive phases since 2018, ICLAIM's Social Mediation initiative succeeded in training Cyprus-based Social Mediators from various backgrounds, professional sectors, and levels/areas of expertise. In 2020 and 2021, the initiative expanded its outreach and training to involve UK-based and non-EU nationals, embracing an international character. An innovation of the 2021 project was the inclusion of adaptive skills in the training, specifically designed to address the challenges caused by social transitions, to support participants in the development of adaptive leadership skills, and facilitate them in addressing individuals' and societies' natural inclination to resist change.

THE 'SOCIAL MEDIATION FOR SOCIAL TRANSITIONS' PROJECT

As Dean Williams said, 'change is the major challenge, but it requires breaking "tribal" boundaries that slow transformations in uneasy water'.¹¹ This change should be taken seriously and should be seen as an opportunity to bring new, innovative methods to encourage groups/communities to face these challenges.

This manual is part of the Social Mediation for Social Transitions project, which ICLAIM implemented through a number of new Social Mediation trainings, from January to March 2021, with the support of the University of Central Lancashire – Cyprus (UCLan Cyprus) and a grant from the University of Central Lancashire Centre for Sustainable Transitions (CST) in the UK.

The manual can be seen as a non-political and non-legal mediation tool which repairs social bonds and helps train individuals to become skilled leaders in guiding communities to handle social change and encourage continuation of interactions amongst groups/communities. It assists with approaching transitional challenges at times of major social adjustments, by allowing space for the resolution of adaptive and technical problems.

Transitional periods of social change, which are most evident in times of crisis, carry growing uncertainty,¹² and this uncertainty has been experienced globally with the Covid-19 pandemic. Change in times of uncertainty is especially challenging for addressing interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Therefore, a practical guide for utilizing Social Mediation in times of crisis and social transition can assist in identifying and mitigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic where political polarisation, social uncertainty and division physically/socially/economically have peaked.

During the pandemic, innovative technological developments have allowed people to communicate, however it has also brought implications while modifying and changing the ways groups/communities interact with each other. Therefore, the effect of Covid-19 on many levels can be eased by providing tools to continue dia-

logue and inspire innovative solutions to reintroduce socio-economic inclusion to groups/communities across the world. With the practices provided in this manual, social cohesion and community resilience can be strengthened, and opportunities for hostility can be reduced.

This Manual on Social Mediation for Social Transitions is drafted from dialogues and feedback gathered from workshops, a network meeting and a roundtable discussion, which took place in the context of the above-mentioned project, where participants shared their insights and suggestions. The discussions promoting the use of Social Mediation in social conflicts caused by social changes and transitions, have contributed to the development of this tool. Through the dissemination of this manual to relevant stakeholders, such as local and international networks, the extent Social Mediation for Social transitions is going to expand as a valuable conflict resolution device.

This Manual on Social Mediation for Social Transitions envisages to be a useful tool for local communities, civil society organisations, and local authorities, NGO staff and members, general-public, teachers, scholars who are interested in social transitions and those who are newly or previously trained as non-formal trainers. Under this project, Social Mediation training is now extended beyond Cyprus, benefitting participants from the UK as well as other countries to gain relevant skills through its hybrid online/face-to-face sessions.

SOCIAL MEDIATION IN CONTEXT

THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Identities: Securitization and (de)securitization

Identity, herein, refers to the intersection of memberships to multiple social groups. On an individual level, social identity could mean belonging to a particular ethnicity/race (i.e., Black, White, Asian or Hispanic), religion (i.e., Muslim or Christian), gender (i.e., LGBTI, female, or male), experience-oriented (i.e., veterans, teachers, housewives), interest-oriented (i.e., bikers, dancers, football fans, language learners) and/ or value/ideology-based (i.e., leftist, liberal, conservative) groups. Multiple social identities coexist for every individual, with some being less visible than others.¹³

Each of the identities individuals associate with is prone to be facing – on a collective level – either non-politicized issues (time-specific and/or technical), politicized issues (structural issues that have direct impact on how individuals express their social identity, and can be managed with changes in the policy), or securitized issues (issues creating existential threats for the individuals, groups, institutions or populations).¹⁴

Social groups that are facing securitized issues, or imminent existential threats against their collective identity, are considered in crisis and are therefore given precedence over other identities, since there is an imminent need to protect them. Securitization theory suggests that identities under threat are prioritized in an attempt to protect them; on the other hand, de-securitization is the process through which a threat decreases or is no longer there, and therefore the identity in question is no longer in danger.¹⁵

¹³ Clair, J. A., Beatty, J. E., & Maclean, T. L. (2005). Out of sight but not out of mind: Managing invisible social identities in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(1), 78-95.

Hornung, J., Bandelow, N. C., & Vogeler, C. S. (2019). Social identities in the policy process. *Policy Sciences*, 52(2), 211-231.

Levy, A., van Zomeren, M., Saguy, T., & Halperin, E. (2017). Intergroup emotions and gateway groups: Introducing multiple social identities into the study of emotions in conflict. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 11(6).

¹⁴ Does, A. (2013). Securitization theory according to the Copenhagen School. Retrieved from <https://books.openedition.org/iheid/719?lang=en>.

Snetkov, A. (2017). Theories, methods and practices—a longitudinal spatial analysis of the (de) securitization of the insurgency threat in Russia. *Security Dialogue*, 48(3), 259-275.

¹⁵ Antoniou, K. (2019). Beyond the speech act: Contact, desecuritization, and peacebuilding in Cyprus. In *Securitization Revisited*, 168-193. Routledge.
Antoniou, K. (2016). De-Securitizing Identity: Narrative (In)Consistency in Periods of Transition. *International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*, 10(4), 1010 – 1016.

Identity as a source of conflict: When an identity is perceived to be under threat, and the affected individual or community identifies a source of that threat, it is likely to consider that source as an enemy and engage in conflict.

SCENARIO 1

The employer at a competitive accounting firm suddenly lowers our salary or refuses to recognise our work. It is possible to feel that our professional identity as acting accountants is under threat, and we might wish to confront them, or report them. It is possible, within the same scenario, to feel that we were targeted because of another identity and not because we were not good professionals. For example, we may perceive hostile behaviour because of our gender, age, or political affiliation.

SCENARIO 2

The same is true for larger-scale identity conflicts such as ethnic disputes. In the case of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, Jewish and Arab populations share a perceived threat against the free and uninterrupted expression of their national, cultural, and religious identities. Both sides in the conflict seek assurance of their safety and recognition of their sovereignty to protect their survival as a society against a threatening enemy.¹⁶

Social mediation can be used in both isolated, interpersonal conflicts and large-scale, intractable cases of group conflicts to facilitate discussions through which the involved parties can identify whether they perceive any of their social identities to be under threat by a designated rival – or by a third party – and act for deconstructing and resolving that threat. The process of deconstructing and resolving an existential threat at the level of intractable ethnic conflict is certainly a multi-faceted and complex one, particularly in periods of crisis, uncertainty and social transition.

¹⁶ Hammack, P. L. (2006). Identity, conflict, and coexistence: Life stories of Israeli and Palestinian adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 21(4), 323-369.

Recognising 'adaptive challenges'

Social transitions often occur as a reaction to what is often referred to as 'adaptive challenges'. These are challenges, that can exist at group or local level, which cannot be solved by a mere recourse to expert knowledge, but rather, require those challenged to find innovative ways of overcoming the challenges in question.¹⁷

For instance, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus itself is a 'technical problem'; professionals with medical expertise have been observing the new virus, and have been developing treatments and new medications, including vaccines, to assist those who developed the disease and those who are willing to take preventive measures so as to combat the further spreading of the virus.

On the other hand, the problems that have derived as a result of the pandemic at the social level, such as polarisation, hostility, marginalisation, exploitation, and the further deepening of all kinds of social inequalities, are not only problems that require expert knowledge to be resolved, but rather constitute 'adaptive challenges' which call for orchestrated action on behalf of various social actors, so as to alleviate the social problems that have (re)surfaced.

Social transitions come with change. Change in communication, interaction, distribution of power, culture and values, environment, allocation of resources are some of the factors that could help mediating a conflict. Yet, change may not be as easy or fast. Individuals, groups, organizations, societies, and larger systems go through a transition period, in which they experience "adaptive" and/ or "technical" challenges,¹⁸ which social mediators may need to resolve as adaptive leaders. Technical challenges are clear and easy to identify. Social mediators could use available resources and procedures to resolve the challenge. Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, are rather harder to identify and require learning, and a willingness by the involved stakeholders to adapt existing approaches, values, and beliefs in order to resolve the issues at stake.¹⁹

¹⁷ For a full analysis of these concepts see: Heifetz, R.A and Linsky M. (2002). *Leadership on the line. Staying alive through the dangers of leading*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston: Harvard Business Press.

SCENARIO 3

A social mediator working at a company may experience a temporary closure of business during COVID-19 pandemic (a technical challenge). Then, when the management of the company decides to switch to remote-work, the staff (particularly the ones that are not as knowledgeable of remote-work technology as others) and the management may experience conflict as the staff are not able to perform as before and the management struggles to manage the remote workforce (adaptive challenges). The social mediator at this company may need to help the management find training for the staff to continue business as usual while working remotely and training for the management to learn the tips of managing the workforce remotely.

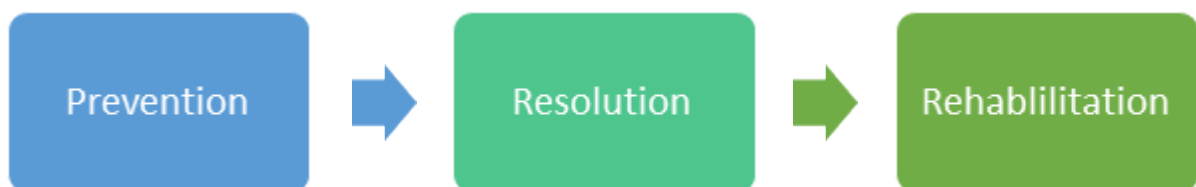
THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIATOR

The Social Mediator ought to:

- *Remain impartial and uninvolved*
- *Facilitate dialogue and set the ground rules for the disputants interaction*
- *Identify issues & stakeholders (direct and indirect)*
- *Articulate each perspective in a clear and balanced manner*
- *Enable inter-disputant empathy*
- *Empower participants to craft their own settlement*

A mediator has the right to acknowledge a deadlock in the mediation process, pause the process, alter it or end it altogether

Social Mediation can be used through three but interrelated streams:²⁰



In this regard, the preventive elements of Social Mediation prove particularly useful in addressing anticipated challenges in group dynamics, where there are visible signs of brewing social conflict, which can be addressed at the earlier stages. In such a context, what a Social Mediator can do is identify and observe the problems that arise before proceeding to choose the appropriate strategy or strategies that will assist with addressing the reasons that lead to social imbalances. Some aspects of the conflict are likely to be 'technical', such as the deprivation of certain groups to have access to specific goods, services, and resources. Other aspects however, those revolving around issues of identity and prejudice, require an adaptive approach, that will allow for the various groups, and individuals within them, to engage in dialogue and reduce the prejudice they may carry.

²⁰ ICLAIM. (2018). Handbook on Social Mediation in the Community: A Guide for Practitioners. https://www.iclaimcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/handbook_final.pdf

Checklist	Social Mediators' Toolbox
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Identify the problem ii. Assess the situation iii. Try to predict problems which may arise iv. Make a list of potential actions, using the Social Mediator's 'toolbox' v. Choose & design the most appropriate action vi. Orchestrating the Conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Community & Group activities ii. (Inter)cultural/ Interreligious activities iii. Awareness raising activities iv. Training & Empowerment v. Human Rights Education vi. Positive Dialogue

ADAPTIVE SKILLS AND 'ORCHESTRATING THE CONFLICT

Strictly speaking, a Mediator is not leading a mediative process. Any mediative process is led by the parties to the conflict who have given their explicit consent to the mediator to offer neutral guidance and assist them in reaching a resolution to the problem or challenge at hand. As such, it is the parties that lead the process, trusting the mediator to offer neutral, calm and dispassionate guidance. Thus, the Mediator assumes the responsibility to ensure that the parties remain motivated and focused in their search for a commonly-agreed resolution.

The problem with 'adaptive challenges' is that they require the parties to engage with difficult, often abstract and controversial issues that cannot be resolved through 'easy fixes', the parties are likely to drift into 'work avoidance'; meaning, the loss of focus and neglecting the most difficult aspects of the conflict, by diverting their attention to simpler, more technical, matters or resorting to tactics which aim—consciously or subconsciously—at displacing the responsibility for progress from their own shoulders, onto somebody else.

Social Mediators, often find themselves in the middle of such unproductive attitudes from participating parties, even after they have provided their consent to engage in social mediation. While tension is normal in conflict situations, it has been observed that both overt and subtle levels of tension can be counterproductive, demotivating the parties from actively striving to achieve a resolution. What the Social Mediator needs to do in response is to orchestrate the conflict,²¹ ensuring that the parties productivity levels maintain the prospect of progress. In other words, they need to calculate the level of tension, and find innovative ways to bring the parties back on the right track, so as to continue their search for a resolution.

There are a number of techniques that can be employed in that regard, depending on whether a Social Mediator needs to 'raise' or 'lower' the 'temperature' during the heated discussion:²²

Raising Temperatures	Lowering Temperatures
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Draw attention to the difficult issues. 2. Give the parties more responsibility than they are comfortable with. 3. Bring to the surface the very factors that constitute the conflict. 4. Give space to those with unpopular/ more radical views to express themselves. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Turn to the technical points of the dispute. 2. Break the problems into parts and establish timeframes, rules and clear assignments that are likely to lead to progress. 3. Temporarily set aside the difficult issues. 4. Make the atmosphere lighter, unburdening the parties from the burden of the more difficult aspects of the problem (e.g. tell a joke, have a break) 5. Reduce expectations

²¹ Heifetz, R.A and Linsky M. (2002). Leadership on the line. Staying alive through the dangers of leading. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

²² Ibid.

THE DOS AND DONTs OF SOCIAL MEDIATORS

Even when addressing adaptive challenges, it is important for Social Mediators to always maintain their role as neutral facilitators, and not engage with participants in the process. Language, body language and reactions to the input of engaged parties are therefore key areas to pay attention to in order to retain impartiality at all times and avoid emotional engagement with the process.

Social Mediators' DOs

Be aware of your prejudgements: As human-beings, all of us have thoughts/ judgements about what others may think (i.e., she thinks based on her emotions because she is a woman) and why they may think or act the way that they do (i.e., all Turkish people act like that because of their culture etc.). We need to be aware of those thoughts/ judgements and avoid acting based on our thoughts/ judgements in the Social Mediation process.

Listen: Our judgemental thoughts about the others could change once we actively listen to the others, and we can learn about what the others actually say, so always listen.

Use your body language: The stakeholders will pay more attention and will be more actively involved in the Social Mediation process when they can clearly see that you are listening to them. Having eye contact, nodding your head when you understand or confirm will help them clearly see that you are listening to them.

Ask questions: Asking questions to clarify will help you understand what is said. Asking questions to encourage talking will help you learn more about what causes conflict and how you can go about with that person, group or community resolving it.

Reflect or summarise what is being said: Reflecting (by restating the meaning of what is said) or summarizing what is said will help you understand whether you accurately heard what the other said and encourage further communication.

Social Mediators' DONTs

Take sides: Taking side or implying a side is better than the "other" in Social Mediation process will perpetuate the existing conflict and decrease reliability of the social mediator.

Engage with any of the sides: In order to achieve an impartial Social Mediation process, social mediators should not engage with any of the disputants before or during the Social Mediation process.

Use judgemental statements: Judgmental sentences may discourage disputants from discussing the issues regarding the conflict, draw them away from the Social Mediation process, and create more conflicts. For this reason, social mediators need to:

Avoid "you" statements, and use "I" or "we" statements: "You" statements are judgemental, so instead of saying "you are wrong", consider saying "I think there is a mistake there." Or "I see this differently..." Or instead of saying "you should do X", consider saying "we need to get X done, will that work? What do you think?"

Instead of "why", use "what": "Why" is a judgmental question. Instead of asking "why did you do that?", consider asking "what made you do that?"

FUTURE OUTLOOK

In conclusion, the manual envisages to be a useful tool for local communities, civil society organisations and individual active citizens, local authorities, NGO staff and members, general-public, teachers, scholars who are interested in social transitions and those who are newly or previously trained as non-formal trainers. With an outlook on current global affairs and societies testing their resilience, from the 2008 financial crisis to the Covid-19 pandemic there is an ever-growing need to foster and ensure social cohesion and dialogue through the appropriate tools. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst in reinforcing many of the technical and the adaptive challenges that already existed in our societies, requiring individual and group efforts to overcome them. In this context, this manual proposes innovative steps that can address the issue of 'social transitions' through Social Mediation, in hope of building stronger social bonds for the future.

