

Self-study Course for Trainers of Intercultural Mediators

Module 3

Psychological issues
in intercultural
mediation

Olympic Training & Consulting Ltd



Erasmus+



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1. Objective of module

As all social services, intercultural mediation involves much interaction between people, and especially vulnerable groups. Different needs, emotions, motives and behaviors are displayed by all involved. The intercultural mediator (IM) needs not only to mediate in order to enable communication despite these differences, but also to deal effectively with the own emotions and reactions. This module enables the trainer to embed the psychological dimension in all aspects and topics of the IM training.

At the end of this module the trainer should be able to:

1. Understand how issues of identity and self-esteem play an important role in mediation and deal with such issues arising in the IM training process
2. Understand the main stages of the IDR cycle
3. Provide counsel to trainees on how to identify, prevent and cope with stress and burn-out, and recognize when mediation parties are under stress
4. Understand the significance of emotional intelligence in intercultural mediation

2. Psychology of mediation: key concepts

Conflict resolution is an important aspect of intercultural mediation. The frequency and intensity of conflict resolution in intercultural mediation for immigrants (IMfl) often depends on the context in which it takes place - according to the country, the employing institution, and the intervention field of the intercultural mediator. However, all intercultural mediators need to develop skills of conflict resolution.

Although psychology and conflict resolution consist distinct professions, **a deeper understanding of the emotional aspects of conflict and resolution processes can contribute to the development of more effective mediation techniques** (Cloke, 2008). As Cloke points out, conflict, contrary to simple disagreement, is characterized by negative emotions, such as anger, fear and shame. Thus every conflict contains by definition an emotional element that has to be perceived, understood and dealt with by the mediator. By looking deeply into the psychological dimensions of mediation, mediators are able to achieve greater flexibility in handling the conflict (Bader, 2010).

At the same time each intercultural mediator himself has his own unique emotional profile, expectations and beliefs that directly or indirectly affect his work. The mediator needs to be aware of them and manage their impact on the process (Hoffman & Wolman, 2013). One major issue is that of **identity**: The intercultural mediator's self-identity and self-esteem play an important role in conflict resolution as much as the parties' identities. What complicates things in intercultural mediation is that not only different (or even multiple) personal and social identities are involved, but also different cultural identities. Needless to say, *identity* is a complex psychological concept and it is not in the scope of this module to cover this issue in depth. Here we will present only key-elements that will help the trainer better understand the challenges faced by trainees. To this purpose, main points of Bader's model of psychology of mediation will be briefly presented here.

Learn more



Hoffman, D.A., & Wolman R.N. (2013). The Psychology of Mediation, *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 14:759-806
<http://cardozojcr.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CAC306.pdf>



Have a look at Mayer's article describing the relationship between conflict and constructivism (<http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr17/mayer.htm>):

- What does this imply for the intercultural mediator and what for his trainer?
- How is this related to the applications of the constructivism theory in education, as described in Module 1 of this course?

2.1. Bader's model of mediation psychology

The sense of self and identity varies greatly between people. There are narcissistic, self-complacent people with a grandiose sense of self, whereas other people lack a clear sense of themselves and others ("identity diffusion"). The sense of self and identity in turn fuels emotions and emotional behaviors during conflict: most people perceive conflict as a **threat to their ego** and may react in an aggressive or defensive way. Underlying feelings of shame or vulnerability often lead to hostile behavior or feeling insulted. Persons who feel very vulnerable may think that who they are is contingent on the outcome of the mediation or what others think about them. The process of mediation is dominated by all these postures and the reactions of the parties (and the mediator) thereto.

On the other hand, with the development of a healthy sense of self, people also develop a realistic and objective sense of self-and-other. This involves the capacity for recognition not just of one's self, but of others too. Obviously, this is very important during conflict: **those who are able to function with adequate objectivity of themselves and others will do better in mediation.**

So it becomes clear, then, why the **deeper dimensions of the self** play such a crucial role in the mediation process. In order to successfully address them the mediator needs to work both at personal and at interpersonal level with the issues of self. At *personal* level the mediator should expect that his own issues of identity and self will arise to varying degrees during mediation. He needs to be aware of his relationship to the behaviors described before, such as aggression, as well of his usual projections on others. Understanding these projections will help the mediator analyze his own reactions and return to neutrality when parties become difficult or challenging. This commitment to *inner* neutrality is considered a prerequisite to well functioning *outward* neutrality.

The mediator also needs to analyze his **professional ego ideal**. Being realistic, recognizing the limits of one's own power and knowledge, along with a steady commitment to clients during the mediation process will help the mediator function optimally.

At *interpersonal* level very useful techniques employed in mediation are **mirroring**¹ and **looping**. In these techniques - that are forms of active listening - the mediator reflects back to the other party the content of their communication. This way the mediator ensures mutual understanding and recognition, helping at the same time parties to relax, feel secure and better understand themselves.

Learn more



In order to better understand how the techniques of *mirroring* and *looping* are used in mediation see the following articles:

- <http://www.dummies.com/careers/career-planning/choosing-a-career/use-mirroring-to-lead-parties-in-mediation/>
- <http://understandinginconflict.org/2011/03/the-loop-of-understanding/>
- <http://www.in-mediation.eu/en/precise-listening>



Observe the trainees and try to understand how their sense of self and identity has impact a) on their relationships with others, and b) on acquiring skills and accomplishing tasks related to intercultural mediation.

2.2. IDR cycle

It has been observed that many conflicts go through a certain cycle of psychological **inflation, deflation and realistic resolution (IDR)**. It is basically caused by the tendency to take conflict personally and **consider the outcome of the mediation as a reflection of who one is** - of one's identity. Understanding the IDR cycle helps mediators **tailor their interventions to the parties' needs and their responsiveness** depending on the stage they are currently at. So what happens at each stage of the cycle? Put very simply, Bader explains the following:

¹ Mirroring as a technique originates from psychotherapy. One definition of mirroring is: "An attempt by the psychologist during a therapeutic interaction/setting/context, via verbal communication with a patient, and perhaps the purposeful inclusion of nonverbal gestures (animation/expression), to repeat, reflect, and represent a patient's remembered emotional, cognitive, and historical experience with great accuracy and true reflection of the real (subjective), remembered experience by the patient." <http://www.fuelforemotionalhealth.com/2013/01/mirroring-a-calculated-therapeutic-technique-or-just-conversation/>

- *The inflation/overconfidence stage*

At the outset of the mediation process parties are generally overconfident or “inflated”. A reason for that is that interpersonal conflict is often experienced as **threatening the value and even the existence of the self**. As a defense to the anxiety caused, parties tend to self-inflate, i.e. to reassure themselves that they will manage successfully. Adrenal surges caused by perceived threat also contribute to the initial inflation.

During this phase, parties usually have **non-realistic expectations**, overestimating the strength of their case, seeming to be unwilling to face adverse facts or denying their own vulnerability. They do not take into account the agenda of the other side, and all this leads to the next stage.

- *Deflationary stage*

When each party begins to realize that the other side exists as an independent agent who envisages a different outcome and proposes a different solution, disappointment and deflation settle in. During this phase parties may feel **insulted** by the offer or the position of the other side, they start to feel **less certain** that they will achieve their desired result, and often **blame** others because things are not going as they “should”.

At this tender phase mediators should exhibit sincere **respect** towards their clients, as this will soothe the feelings of insult and deflation. At the same time mediators need to remind parties that the decision making process has to be kept as **objective** as possible. Overreacting to the negative feelings caused by the conflict impedes the resolution process.

- *Realistic resolution*

When the parties manage to develop a **sense of self-and-other** they also succeed in settling their dispute. They abandon the expectation to achieve only their own ideal result and are eager to accept a practical and realistic solution. Often this coincides with recovering from the sense of injured pride and disappointment. They do no longer view the outcome of mediation as a reflection of who they are.

As Bader points out, this phase is not reached through manipulation or dictation. Rather, the conflict itself, coupled with the process of mediation, implicitly or explicitly drives the parties in this direction.

○ *Impasse*

In certain cases both parties hang onto their sense of insult and injured pride, and refuse to move past them. In such a case we are talking about impasse. Emotions and reactions are generally the same as during deflation; however the refusal to give in is more pronounced.

When impasse occurs, the mediator can do two things in order to help the parties move on: a) **depersonalize the impasse** and sense of result, and b) help parties **evaluate the options** they have that are objectively useful for them, even if they are not the solutions the parties had initially envisioned. Parties either respond to that, moving on to realistic resolution, or they persist in their impasse and the mediation process ends there.

The issues of self and identity are particularly important during the stages of deflation and impasse. As far as the *mediator* is concerned, it is very important that he keeps his commitment to do what is right for the parties. He shouldn't focus on what is right for his own self-image, as he would lose this way both his integrity and the parties to the mediation. In other words, the mediator has to release the sense of narcissistic self-investment in the outcome.

The *parties*, on the other hand, need also to release their psychological investments in the outcome of the mediation process. The key objective for the clients is to **learn to let go**; to do what is best for their long-term interests, not their injured pride. They need to realize that **compromise does not mean that they are personally inadequate**; rather, it is necessary because we live in a world of conflicting interests. The mediator can help parties gain the sense of self-and-other by considering the needs and requirements of all the people involved in the conflict and evaluating useful options.



Bader cautions that “particularly in certain types of cases... some parties may not be able to be overconfident, and may initially present with deflation. In these cases, we must take care to “do no harm”... to these sensitive people, and, hopefully, encourage them to find adequate support from others during the process of mediation”.

☞ *How likely is that to happen in the context of intercultural mediation?*

- ☞ *What would the role of the intercultural mediator be in such a case, taking into account the deontology of IMfI?*

Learn more 

The Psychology of Mediation: Issues of Self and Identity and the IDR Cycle, Elizabeth Bader, 10 PEPP. DISP. RESOL. L. J. 183 (2010)
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/aps.295/abstract>

“We were like them”. Intersecting Identities and Mediators’ Intercultural Communication in a Municipal Service <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr31/soru.html>

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Keywords:

Emotional aspects of conflict; identity; IDR cycle; self-and-other

Questions for reflection:

- ☞ How important is conflict resolution in the role of IMfI in your country? In what types of conflicts are IMfI expected to intervene?
- ☞ Think of a conflict you experienced recently: Can you identify the different stages of the IDR cycle?
- ☞ How can you use the information presented in this section in order to help your trainees obtain more insight in conflict situations?

3. Stress and burnout in intercultural mediation

Stress and burnout are quite common among intercultural mediators, especially among those who have received no specific training on how to cope with stressors. Therefore the TIME IMfl training course places great emphasis on equipping trainees with knowledge and skills that will enable them to cope effectively with stress and prevent burnout. Although this is the subject of specific topics of the course, IM trainers of all fields and topics need to have understanding about the common stressors in IMfl and to be able to recognize signs of stress and burnout in trainees. This will help trainees develop increased self-awareness and stronger protection mechanisms.

3.1. Common stressors in intercultural mediation

Intercultural mediators face a number of stressors that have to do both with the nature of tasks they have to perform (interpreting and mediation) and their working environment (healthcare, social services, police, dealing with vulnerable people).

- *Interpreting*

Many people think of interpreting as a simple task, provided one knows two languages well. However, interpreting is a highly complex cognitive task that is often very stressful. Stress can affect the interpreter's concentration, memory, and ability to handle the mentally strenuous complexity of language conversion. Some of the stressors mentioned in research are:

- Unattainably high performance expectations
- Conflicting view among consumers' understanding of the interpreter's role
- Emotional reactions and duress with no outlet for dealing with them
- Involvement in private and sensitive situations
- Real and perceived skill inadequacies
- The significance of accuracy for the immigrants' life
- Lack of professional support available after graduation

In addition, it is well documented that first-person interpreting may cause **vicarious trauma**, resulting in symptoms and reactions similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Vicarious trauma is often referred to as *compassion fatigue* or *secondary traumatic stress disorder*. It is similar to but not identical with burnout.

- *Mediation tasks*

Think of the challenges posed to the IM by:

- The need to maintain **neutrality**, even if the IM has strong feelings about an issue
- The need to balance between **different power relations** between professionals and immigrants, and professionals and himself
- The **negative emotions** prevailing in conflict situations

- *Working environment*

IMs often work in changing environments, which can be stressful in itself. No matter in which field the IM is working, there is a constant need for **role awareness**. As explained in Module 5, topic 3 of the TIME IMfl course, role awareness includes a number of variables. In addition, the IM is **constantly exposed to vulnerable people suffering distress** and pain (physical or emotional), while in many cases he has **no real control** over the procedures involved. The professionals the IM works with are often overloaded and burned-out themselves.

There are also stressors inherent to the field of intervention. In *healthcare*, for example, IMs are faced with hurried providers, upset patients, exhausting schedules, difficult terminology, heartbreaking stories, challenging ethical dilemmas, and death. In *social services* both social workers and IMs face often clients in crisis, time pressure, inadequate resources, injustice, ambiguous, conflicting roles, and changing external factors. In the *Police, reception centers, asylum services* etc. IMs are often confronted with unyielding legislation, desperate immigrants and tense officers.

Learn more



- *Stress and the Interpreter*, research paper by Said Shahat (World Association of Arab Translators) available at www.wata.cc/forums/uploaded/1835_1170187829.doc
- *Compassion Fatigue*, The American Institute of Stress <http://www.stress.org/military/for-practitionersleaders/compassion-fatigue/>
- *Stress within the Social Work Profession*, New England University <http://socialwork.une.edu/resources/news/stress-within-the-social-work-profession/>
- *Stress Busters for Interpreters (And Everyone Else)*, by Julie Burns http://www.imiaweb.org/uploads/docs/interpreterstress_julie_burns.pdf

- *Interpreter Care: From Personal to Organizational Strategies for Dealing with Job Stress*, by Sandage, D. & Boerboom, S.
www.imiaweb.org/uploads/presentations/14.ppt
- *Social Workers May Indirectly Experience Post-traumatic Stress*, University of Georgia. ScienceDaily, 10 January 2007
www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/01/070104144711.htm

3.2. *Burnout: risk factors, symptoms and prevention*

Burnout is a long term reaction to prolonged stress in the workplace or elsewhere. It can be described as an **exhaustion process**, a state of emotional, physical or mental depletion in which the person cannot perform normally and is overwhelmed by the everyday tasks. When the term was first introduced in the 1970s by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger it was used to describe the consequences of severe stress and high ideals experienced by people working in helping professions. Nowadays it is accepted that burnout can happen to anyone. Nevertheless, burnout rates are especially high in the helping professions: Teachers, physicians, nurses, and social workers are among the 10 professions at highest risk. The downward spiral of exhaustion or burnout (see diagram on the next page) generally lasts several months or even years and can be reversed at any point, before it ultimately leads to stress-associated illnesses such as depression.

Even though burnout is widespread and has become a popular term, there exists **no clear definition** of the term. Burnout may have a very wide range of symptoms; some researchers listed up to 130! (Korczak et al, 2010). This can cause difficulties for diagnosis, as there may be many common symptoms with anxiety disorders, depression and other chronic conditions.

The typical areas of **symptoms** of burnout are (Pub Med Health, 2013):

- **Emotional exhaustion:** People feel drained and exhausted, overloaded, tired and low, and do not have enough energy. Physical problems include stomach pains and digestion problems.



“Burnout does not have a specific set of symptoms with clearly defined criteria. To date, there exists neither an objective disease marker nor a unified definition of symptoms that characterise burnout. Despite the fuzzy terminology, burnout is a consequence of stress at work with far-reaching medical and economic consequences.”

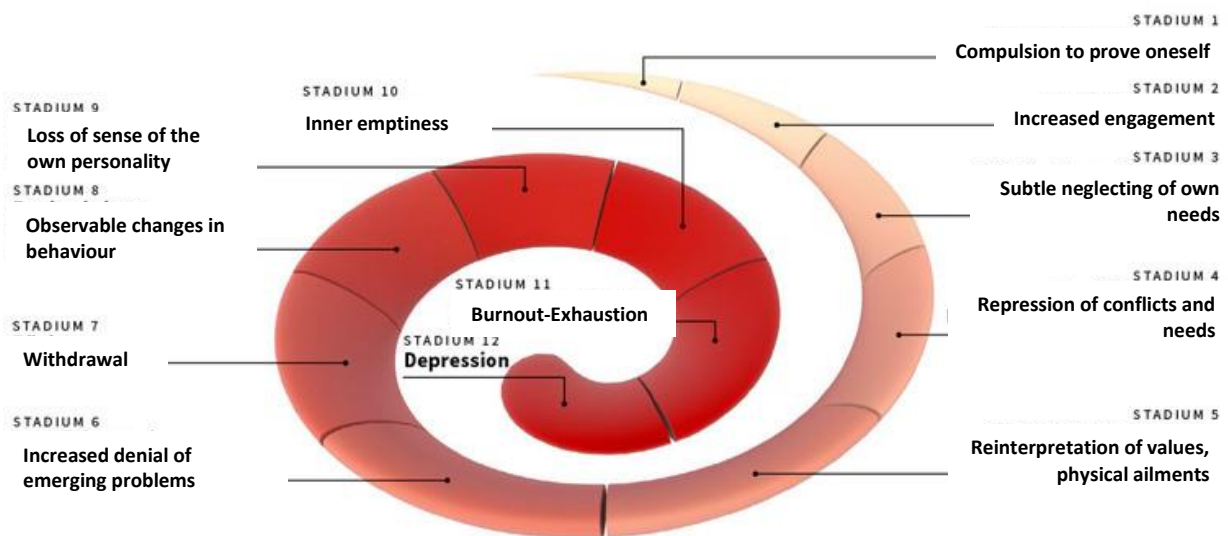
– Prof. Dr. med. Roland von Känel

- **Alienation from (job-related) activities:** People find their jobs increasingly negative and frustrating. They may develop a cynical attitude towards their work environment and their colleagues. They may, at the same time, increasingly distance themselves emotionally, and disengage themselves from their work.
- **Reduced performance:** Burnout mainly affects everyday tasks at work, at home or when caring for family members. People with burnout are very negative about their activities, find it hard to concentrate, are listless and lack creativity.

Many different risk factors have been proposed for the development of burnout. Generally speaking, the interaction of the person with his/her particular environment leads to a more or less effective adaptation to stressors. This means that **the personality, motives, lifestyle and interests of a person interact with the organizational structure of workplace, hierarchy, and task-specific stressors.**

According to the Mayo Clinic, there is an increased risk of developing burnout if:

- You identify so strongly with work that you **lack a reasonable balance** between your work life and your personal life
- You try to be **everything to everyone**
- You work in a **helping profession**, such as health care, counseling or teaching
- You feel you have **little or no control** over your work
- Your job is monotonous



Burnout spiral according to Freudenberger and adapted by von Känel, 1990, ©Burnout Protector Ltd. (English tags by Olympic Training). Source: <http://www.burnoutprotector.com/en/burnout/>



Visit

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642?pg=1>

and https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_08.htm to see some of the signs of burnout. How could you use this information to help your trainees become more self-aware?

It is obvious that preventing burnout or coping with it is crucial for intercultural mediators. What can help? Here is a list of practical things that can make a real difference:

- ☞ Manage the stressors
- ☞ Adjust your attitude
- ☞ Reevaluate priorities
- ☞ Evaluate your options
- ☞ Seek social support
- ☞ Eat a healthy diet
- ☞ Get some exercise
- ☞ Get enough sleep
- ☞ Have a hobby
- ☞ Get pauses during work
- ☞ Increase your knowledge about stress and burnout
- ☞ Learn and train problem solving techniques
- ☞ Learn to manage time effectively
- ☞ Practice relaxation techniques
- ☞ Avoid all kinds of drugs and medications without prescription

The ability to develop awareness of stressors and the emotional state of oneself, cope successfully with stress, and prevent burnout is essential for intercultural mediators to be able to provide effective services and derive satisfaction from their occupation. Emotional intelligence, which is briefly described in the next session, is of great importance for both stress management and the conflict resolution processes discussed before.

Learn more 

- *The Relationships between Perfectionism, Stress, Coping Resources, and Burnout among Sign Language Interpreters*, by Tomina J. Schwenke
http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1086&context=cps_diss
- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>
- <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/preventing-burnout.htm>

Sources:

Interpreter Care: From Personal to Organizational Strategies for Dealing with Job Stress, by Sandage, D. & Boerboom, S. www.imiaweb.org/uploads/presentations/14.ppt

Online Stress Management Support Groups for Social Workers,
<http://ssw.unc.edu/RTI/presentation/PDFs/Onlinestress.pdf>

Stress Busters for Interpreters (And Everyone Else), by Julie Burns
http://www.imiaweb.org/uploads/docs/interpreterstress_julie_burns.pdf

Depression: What is burnout syndrome? Pub Med Health
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0072470/>

Korczak D, Kister C, Huber B. *Differentialdiagnostik des Burnout-Syndroms. HTA-Bericht 105* (in German). Deutsches Institut für Medizinische Dokumentation und Information (DIMDI). Cologne; 2010. https://portal.dimdi.de/de/hta/hta_berichte/hta278_bericht_de.pdf

Job burnout: How to spot it and take action, Mayo Clinic, <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>

Understanding Burnout: What Causes Burnout? <http://www.burnoutprotector.com/en/burnout/>
http://stress.lovetoknow.com/Which_Professionals_are_Prone_to_Burnout

http://www.epapsy.gr/files/Odigos_Prolipsis_Burnout.pdf

Keywords:

Stress factors; exhaustion; prevention; balance

Questions for reflection:

- ☞ Do you see any connection between the sense of identity/self and the reaction to stressful situations?
- ☞ How important is it for trainers to be role-models in coping with stress?

4. Emotional intelligence in intercultural mediation

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize your emotions, understand what they're telling you, and realize how your emotions affect people around you. It also involves your perception of others: when you understand how they feel, this allows you to manage relationships more effectively. Daniel Goleman, the psychologist who made EI a popular concept, identified 5 elements of it:

1. **Self-awareness:** The ability to recognize one's own emotions, strengths and weaknesses.
2. **Self-regulation:** The ability to control one's own emotions effectively.
3. **Motivation:** It refers to the ability to set long-term goals, having a positive view on challenges, and enjoying what one is doing.
4. **Empathy:** The ability to recognize and understand the emotions, needs and viewpoints of others.
5. **Social skills:** They include teamwork, good communication skills, managing disputes, and maintaining good relationships.



Take these free EI quizzes!

- <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/ei-quiz.htm>
- <https://www.arealme.com/eq/en/>

Then try to analyze how each variable of the first quiz a) affects your own performance, and b) would likely affect the performance of an intercultural mediator.

As demonstrated by the first sections of this module, a deep understanding of oneself and others, as well as managing multiple sources of stress and strong emotions, is essential for intercultural mediators. The good thing is that EI can be learned and this learning can take place at any time in life. Learning how to overcome stress in the moment and in one's relationships is a



Emotional intelligence affects:

- Your performance at work
- Your physical health
- Your mental health
- Your relationships

great help to become and remain emotionally aware. However, there is a difference between knowing *about* EI and *applying* it in real-life: Changing behavior is a complex process that usually requires time and is intrinsically related with the values, intentions and the inner self of the person. This is something trainers of IMfl need to take into account in order to be able to provide insightful guidance and support.

Sources:

Emotional Intelligence: Developing Strong "People Skills",
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_59.htm

Improving Emotional Intelligence (EQ), <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/emotional-health/emotional-intelligence-eq.htm>

Keywords:

Self-awareness; self-regulation; motivation; empathy; social skills

Questions for reflection:

- ☞ Do you believe that EI can be developed only through specific modules of the TIME IMfl course or should it be cultivated throughout the IM training?
- ☞ Do you think that a person with low EI could become a successful IM? Why?
- ☞ Which aspects of EI could you best cultivate in trainees when delivering training in your field of specialization? What training activities would you use to that purpose?

5. Selected reading

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German

- *Konfliktlösungs-Tools: Klärende und deeskalierende Methoden für die Mediations- und Konfliktmanagement-Praxis* (Edition Training aktuell) (2015, Knapp)
- *Mediation - die erfolgreiche Konfliktlösung: Grundlagen und praktische Anwendung* (2002, Hösl)
- *Mediation: Psychologische Grundlagen und Perspektiven* (2013, Montada, Kals)
- *Anmerkungen zu einigen Grundfragen der Mediation aus psychologischer Sicht (Mediationswerkstatt Münster)* http://www.mediationswerkstatt-muenster.de/fileadmin/daten/mediationswerkstatt/literatur/Mediation_aus_psychologischer_Sicht.pdf
- *Die Konfliktlösung* <http://www.berufsstrategie.de/bewerbung-karriere-soft-skills/konflikte-konfliktloesung-konfliktbewaeltigung.php>

- *Burnout in Sozialberufen* <http://psychologie-news.stangl.eu/975/burn-out-in-sozialberufen>

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