6-12-2017

Mediators' Self-Perception of their Work and Practice: Content and Lexical Analysis

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Abstract

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Keywords

Mediation Practice, Work Experience, Semi-Structured Interviews, Lexical Analysis, Textual Data Analysis Software

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Mediation is increasingly used in various areas of society. Yet few studies have shed light on the unique work of mediators and their perception of the "mediator effect" on the process. The purpose of this qualitative study is to gather and compare mediators' views about their work through feedback on their practices and to understand what they perceive as the bases for reaching a favorable outcome. This article presents the results of a content analysis of interviews with 13 mediators from different countries and cultures. The analysis grouped professional discourses into four areas: the process of the mediation meeting, mediation models and styles, mediator training, and family mediation. Each of these classes is broken down into sub-classes that describe the more salient elements of their perceived practice of mediation and self-efficacy. These results are then discussed regarding their application for the process and success of mediation. Keywords: Mediation Practice, Work Experience, Semi-Structured Interviews, Lexical Analysis, Textual Data Analysis Software

Mediations, often used in the plural (Battistoni, 2012), cover a variety of practices, objectives and perceptions (Picard, 2002). While some authors have tried to highlight certain mediator styles and techniques (Alexander, 2008; McLaughlin, Carnevale, & Lim, 1991), it is not always possible to determine the impact of their work on the outcome of mediation (Cheung & Yiu, 2007; Wall, Stark, & Standifer, 2001). Thus, in this study we focus on mediators' own views about their practices. To better grasp mediators' thinking about alternative conflict resolution processes, we seek to uncover the elements of the mediators' practices that they consider effective in achieving a positive resolution.

According to Wood and Bandura (1989), self-efficacy "refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to situational demands" (p. 408). Since then, there have been many studies in various fields (e.g. Harrison, Rainer, Hochwarter, & Thompson, 1997; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991), including the field of work (e.g. Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998), that have brought to light the positive relationship between perceived self-efficacy and performance. The present study falls within this view, as we consider that efficacy beliefs affect not only the ways in which people act but also their actions themselves.

Our purpose is to identify which elements facilitate and which hinder the mediation process and, in particular, the aspects of a mediator's perceived work and self-efficacy that may affect conflict resolution. We examine formal mediation practices (Stebé, 2008), in which the mediators, the disputants, and their respective roles are known and recognized (Carrière, 1992). We present the results of a qualitative study analyzing the discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1995) of 13 mediators on mediation practices, to move beyond guidelines about what should be done toward a deeper understanding of the perception of their work in practice. This method of discourse analysis has never, to our knowledge, been used to study mediators' discourse. Yet

such a method is invaluable for bringing to light what mediators themselves believe to be effective (skills, methods, or styles) in responding to the individual and situational requirements of the mediation. These results are discussed in terms of their perceived relevance and their effectiveness in mediation practice and process.

Mediators' Impact on the Mediation Process

Studies on this subject have identified the objective characteristics of mediators that may influence the mediation process; but they have most often been studied independently of one another.

Backgrounds

Mediators seem to share values of respect and human dignity, a preference for compromise, and concerns about the recognition of their profession (Lesoeurs, Ben Mrad, & Guillaume-Hofnung, 2009; Tapia, 2010). However, beyond these considerations, little research has been done on the impact of their profiles on the outcome of mediation.

Gender may have an effect. Researchers have shown that women behave more cooperatively in negotiations than men (Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998), that female mediators act in a more transformative way, and are more facilitating and less directive than their male counterparts (Nelson, Zarankin, & Ben-Ari, 2010). Moreover, women, more than men, consider themselves able to understand non-verbal communication (Desivilya, Ady-Nagar, & Ben-Bashat, 2004). Differences in education and/or career paths may also have an effect. The professional vocabulary used (in terms of "lodge a complaint" for a lawyer or "diagnosis" for a psychologist) is also significant (Desivilya et al., 2004). These differences in terms of socio-demographic profiles may be related to the outcome of mediation and whether it is successful.

The personality of the mediators and the disputants may also be an important element affecting the intervention. The dimensions "agreeableness" and "extraversion" seem to be predominant. According to Ford, Wood, and Bell (2008), the disputants' scores on these two qualities predict which conflict resolution styles (compete, collaborate, avoid, accommodate; e.g., Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) will be used. Yet studies on the personality of mediators in connection with the outcome of the mediation are rare. In Taiwan, Chi, Friedman, and Yang (2009) studied subordinates' perception of the fairness of their superiors as mediators. Subordinates perceived their superiors-mediators as more "extraverts" and "agreeable" than equitable, but only when they were much older than the subordinates.

Studies on mediators and their practices have also resulted in a list of the knowledge and the skills expected of them. These skills, which are often described in very general terms, are primarily social skills (Argyle, 1994): communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal, empathy (Della Noce, 1999), the mastery of "traditional" techniques fostering active listening (Rogers, 1995), and guiding the mediation meetings well through reformulating, probing, and managing speaking time and silences. The skills of the mediator also involve managing emotion (Jones & Bodtker, 2001; Jameson, Bodtker, & Linker, 2010). For example, an experimental study of conflict resolution using the Internet (Friedman, Anderson, Brett, Olekalns, Goates, & Lisco, 2004) showed that the expression of anger by the parties reduced the number of outcomes resulting in an agreement. The mediator, more than others, should have therefore acquired and developed skills to better understand and manage their own emotions as well as those of the people in conflict. Recently, in a Luxembourg study using the *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire* (TEIQue), managing emotions was tested with three groups of people: 36 mediators, 31 mediation students and 32 people with no connection

to the world of mediation. The results showed that the mediators had an overall higher score than the control group, but the results were less marked in the scores on each subscale questionnaire (Houssemand, Pignault, Meyers, & Heim, 2014). However, few studies have established a link between the development and the implementation of specific skills and the outcome of the mediation.

All of these elements (socio-demographic, personality, and skills) should be taken into consideration and studied in greater detail in order to understand the mediator's impact (the "mediator effect") on conflict resolution.

Mediator Styles: Theoretical Models and Principles Influence Practice

Just as there is not *one* kind of mediation but *many* mediations (Faget, 2012), there is not *one* practice, but *many* practices of mediation. In this regard, scholars have stressed the lack of a universally accepted model (Jameson et al., 2010) and even a "lack of consensus about definitions of mediation styles" (Charkoudian, 2012, p. 367).

Models for Practice. Nevertheless, in the literature (e.g., Della Noce, 2012; Pruitt, 2012; Wall & Kressel, 2012) it has now become common to distinguish among several approaches or styles of mediation as being facilitative, evaluative, transformative or narrative (McDermott, 2012). In facilitative mediation, based on principled negotiation established in 1981 by Fisher and Ury, the mediator follows a series of predetermined steps and leads the parties to a mutually satisfactory agreement. In this case, mediators play a supporting role in the quality of interactions; they manage the process and not the content.

Conversely, in the evaluative approach, the mediator is more focused on the compromise proposal and the search for solutions. In this case, according Riskin (1994, p. 111), "the mediator who evaluates assumes that the participants want and need her to provide some guidance as to the appropriate grounds for settlement - based on law, industry practice or technology - and that she is qualified to give such guidance by virtue of her training, experience, and objectivity."

More recently, Bush and Folger (1994, 2005) have examined the possibility for the mediator to intervene without influencing the mediation process. Thus, they prefer the transformative model of mediation aimed at the parties' empowerment and mutual recognition. Transformative mediation, which is non-directive, is thus considered as a "process in which a third party works with parties in conflict to help them change the quality of their conflict interaction from negative and destructive to positive and constructive, as they discuss and explore various topics and possibilities for resolution" (Bush & Folger, 1994, p. 2). The mediator grants more space to expressing and understanding emotions as drivers of change.

Narrative mediation, which is less well-known, has its source in social constructivist theory (Winslade & Monk, 2001). It proposes a different perception of conflict and of practice. The mediator plays a special place in the narrative, in its construction, and its reconstruction to help the parties understand and take ownership of their own story.

This brief description of the main models, while not exhaustive, enables us to consider the potentially marked differences in the practice of mediators who have opted for one or the other of these models as a theoretical framework or as a practical guide.

Theoretical Principles. As regards theory, or in other words, prescriptions of what should be done, in practice mediators have to come to terms with certain principles that are generally accepted *a priori*, such as neutrality, impartiality, and equidistance (Cobb & Rifkin, 1991; Karim & Pegnetter, 1983; Kaufman & Duncan, 1992). In the definition cited above, Moore (1996) refers to "the intervention of an acceptable third-party who as limited (or no) authoritative decision-power" and "an impartial third-party." Guillaume-Hofnung (2005, p. 71) also emphasizes the mediator's character as "impartial and independent, without binding or

consultative power, with his/her sole authority conferred upon him/her by [the mediated parties]" (translated here). In practice and in an actual mediation, however, these principles can be challenged, in particular that of neutrality (Cohen, Luxenburg, Dattner, & Matz, 1999).

Neutrality has been largely debated (Beck & Sales, 2000; Cobb & Rifkin, 1991; Rothman, 2014). Beck and Sales (2000) have discussed mediator neutrality at length and distinguish two concepts. First, *neutrality-as-impartiality* is defined as the lack of personal bias on the part of the mediator. In practice, however, this attitude may be difficult to maintain and verify since mediators, like everyone else, have beliefs and values that inevitably influence their actions. The second concept, *neutrality-as-equidistance*, means that the mediator must prevent one party from gaining power over the other and if necessary, must intervene to rebalance the situation. However, for this second concept, contradictory to the first, one may question what elements the mediator takes into account to achieve this rebalancing (Beck & Sales, 2000). According to the international literature, a positive association has been found between a more directive, investigative, and active style and the production of lasting agreements. Kressel, Frontera, Florenza, Butler, and Fish (1994), for example, have identified two mediation styles and advocate the second. The first is to maintain impartiality and to strive for agreement above all without seeking to know the causes of the dispute, which they call a "settlement-oriented style." The second attempts to investigate the underlying causes of the problem and to orient the discussion towards the choice of options in adopting a more strategic approach leading to effective problem solving, what they term a "problem-solving style."

Techniques and Strategies of Mediators

In addition to prescriptions of what one should do, through experience mediators develop strategies that they use in practice. The methods and techniques used by mediators have been analyzed (Henderson, 1996; Herrman, 2006; Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; McLaughlin et al., 1991; Riskin, 1994, 2003; Six, 1990; Touzard, 1977). In addition, several studies have gone beyond identifying these techniques (or operating modes), and have grouped them together depending on the objective pursued by the mediator. In 1990, Lim and Carnevale distinguished 43 different "tactics" that statistical analysis grouped together into six major sets with distinct objectives: "agreement," "establishing good communication," "trust," "agenda," "face-saving," and "suggestions." In Wall et al.'s (2001) synthesis of methods used, three main groups were identified: one focused on the disputants, one centered on the relationship between them, and one oriented towards the relationship between the disputants and third parties. Cheung and Yiu (2007) distinguished 32 different strategies used by mediators in the construction industry, which they classified into three sets: the first set related to the perceptions of the people in conflict, the second to the mediation process, and the last centered on the outcome.

These various taxonomies of methods may all be useful if they are connected to the mediation's outcome (Henderson, 1996). Lim and Carnevale (1990) found, for example, that deciding on an agenda and helping set priorities were positively related to reaching an agreement, whatever the nature of the dispute.

In this study, we analyze the self-perception of mediators' work and its effect on both the process and outcome of the mediation. We define activity as what is done or what is called into play to perform a task (Falzon, 2004). The point is not to limit ourselves to abstract principles and theories about mediation, such as neutrality and impartiality which are always right but not always used, in order to understand the effects of their perceived mediation process-efficacy and self-efficacy on actual conflict resolution. Thus logically, after having identified the relevant issues for the interviews, we contacted several professionals and then collected and analysed their discourse. Mediation professionals and researchers, as well as

more broadly those in the field of analysing professional practices, may thus find a new perspective on the activity of mediation, that of the mediators themselves, as well as a new methodology for classifying and analysing discourse on practices. As researchers in work psychology and practice analysis as well as mediation, we know that is often possible for people to "do" something without however being able to explain to others *how* they do it (Pignault & Loarer, 2011). Moreover, we are convinced that qualitative research is essential for identifying and understanding practices, for researchers but also for practitioners.

Method

Design

To meet these research objectives, we conducted a qualitative heuristic study with semi-structured, face-to-face interviews lasting 55 to 120 minutes with the same interview structure. First, each mediator was informed of the study subject and its goals. We asked for permission to record the interview, specifying that the interview would be transcribed in its entirety and analyzed while guaranteeing the subject's anonymity. We also told them that the recording could be stopped at any moment if they wished. All of the mediators gave their consent. The mediator was told the study subject: a better understanding of the elements that foster or hinder the mediation process. The topics addressed during the interview started with the participants' career history and education and the reasons for their choice of mediation, either originally or as a career change. Next, the mediators were invited to give their views about the extent to which certain contextual characteristics (e.g., whether with families or organizations), situational (e.g. whether the conflict is recent or older) or the characteristics of the people involved (e.g. whether younger or older people) affected meditation. These professionals were also asked to reflect on "the mediator effect" and thus to think about which aspects of their practices they judged to be more effective in reaching a favorable outcome. Finally, the mediators gave their opinions about what makes a mediation successful.

Participants

We interviewed 13 mediators who all shared a "Latin" [southern European] view of mediation (Bonafé-Schmitt, Dahan, Salzer, Souquet, & Vouche, 2003). The choice was made to interview mediation professionals who had tested theory in actual practice. Thus, all the mediators involved practice or have practiced mediation and four of them also conduct research on the subject. In addition, we designed this study with mediators of diverse backgrounds in order to obtain different perceptions (see Table 1). Note also that, as we wanted to have points of view from different cultures, these mediators reside in different countries: France, Luxembourg, Canada and Spain. They were all, however, French-speaking (either native language or second language). We identified several mediators using professional networks in different countries, and then contacted them and presented the study. For those who accepted, we travelled to their location to conduct the interviews. The interviews were originally in French and were then translated by a professional translator. Finally, we should note that three of the participants worked in co-mediation, while for others, the use of co-mediation was often reserved for cases considered more difficult. Seniority in the field of mediation varied from six to 35 years (Mean: 19.15; Standard Deviation: 9.21 years). For some (former lawyers in particular), mediation was a career change or a new specialty.

Table 1. *Participant profiles*

Mediators' Characteristics		Number
Men		3
Women		10
Countries	France	4
	Luxembourg	3
	Canada	5
	Spain	1
Backgrounds	Social work or social assistance	4
	Law	3
	Sociology	3
	Psychology	1
	Education	1
	Law and political science	1
Mediation field	Family	4
	Corporate	1
	Social mediation	1
	Multiple dispute contexts (neighbors, school, family, prison, etc.)	7
Status	Salaried professionals and senior mediators	7
	Self-employed	3
	Teacher-researchers	3

Our sampling method conforms to the four theoretical and practical criteria recommended for interview-based qualitative research (Robinson, 2014). Moreover, we designed the study to obtain a sample of mediator profiles that are close to that of the "typical" mediator. Indeed, a study by Hayes (2002) in the UK has shown that mediators are mostly women (75%), with a university or professional degree (80%) and often over 50 years old (55%). Mediation is often a second job and most mediators work alone (59%) or in co-mediation (31%). Hayes (2002) also proposed a typology of three types of mediators: those working in social welfare with a social worker degree and with extensive experience in mediation work; those working in the private sector with backgrounds in law and less experience in mediation; and finally, those who work in various social fields, without a social worker or legal degree but with considerable mediation experience.

Data Analysis

We created a file containing the transcription of all the interviews in their totality, along with the main participant characteristics (age, gender, background, mediation field and status) in order to see whether the discourse used was characteristic of a given class during the analysis phase. As this was an exploratory study, we conducted a morphosyntactic and lexical analysis using the software Alceste (Reinert, 1990). One of the major benefits of this textual data analysis lies in the inductive nature of the approach.

Alceste software identifies the main lexical universes present in a textual corpus by focusing on similarities and differences in vocabulary and reporting the distribution of vocabulary in the statements that make up the corpus. It identifies classes that are composed of

homogeneous sets of statements (elementary context units), in the sense of the co-occurrence of the vocabulary in a given class. These classes differ significantly from each other. The software initially categorizes participants' responses into a Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC). Then, it tries to establish a correspondence between the responses of one participant and those of other individuals or groups of individuals using supplementary variables (age, gender, etc.). The researcher's task is then to attribute meaning to each of the classes identified from the corresponding semantic field.

Results

Overall, the DHC showed that the corpus of interviews was divided into four classes that significantly represent the speech of those interviewed (77% of the corpus); in other words, 2,474 elementary context units (UCE) were classified in all. In the dendrogram (Figure 1), we see that classes 3 and 4 are distinguished from classes 1 and 2. In fact, classes 1 and 2 characterize the "how": how mediators proceed in mediation and what tools, techniques or strategies they implement to help the process, while classes 3 and 4 refer to the "who": who are these mediators and what elements characterize their career paths, experience, and the field they work in.

Class 2: Mediation Models and Styles

Class 1: Process of the Mediation Meeting: Facilitating and Hindering Elements

Class 4: Illustration of the Mediation Process in Practice: Family Mediation

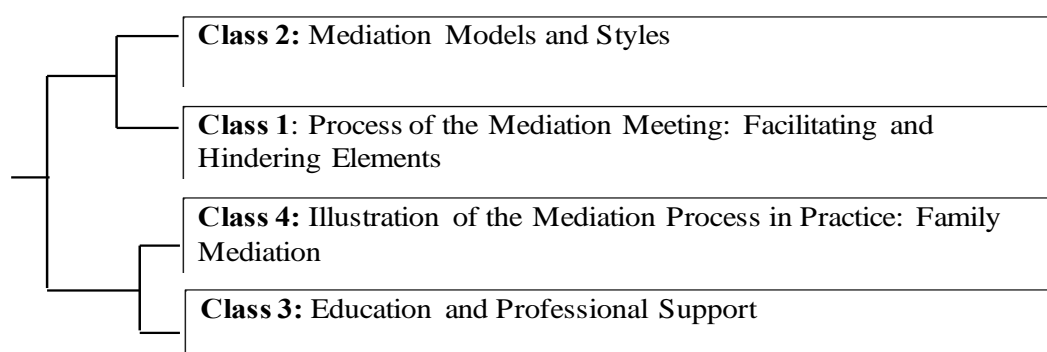**Class 3:** Education and Professional Support

Figure 1: Dendrogram of stable classes resulting from the DHC

From clues such as the specific vocabulary (determined by chi-square value), the most representative ECUs, and the supplementary variables significantly associated with each of these classes, we were able to define the classes more precisely. Hierarchical classifications provided for each class are a complementary result and help visualize local relationships between forms of the same class. The aggregated groupings of the forms observed helps distinguish characteristic categories (sub-classes).

In order to more clearly present the results and provide characteristic statements, while also maintaining the anonymity of the participants, we designated each mediator with initials that correspond to a code created specifically for this study.

Process of the Mediation Meeting: Facilitating and Hindering Elements (Class 1)

Class 1 is composed of 1,129 ECUs, 45% of the analyzed corpus. It is clearly characteristic of practitioners (chi-square = 304) and more specifically, mediators in Luxembourg (chi-square = 304) who have education in social (chi-square = 170) or legal fields (chi-square = 68) and who work in multiple contexts (family mediation, among neighbors, at school, etc.) (Chi-square = 130). Inversely, we noted the significant absence in this class of

discourse by mediators with education in sociology (chi-square = -140) and research (chi-square = -72).

Overall, this class describes the process of the mediation meeting as well as mediation techniques and strategies used by mediators to facilitate the process or deal with problems (see Table 2, categories 1-3).

Table 2. *Categories associated with the specific vocabulary of Class 1*

Cat. 1	people $\chi^2 = 25$; to say $\chi^2 = 24$; to speak $\chi^2 = 19$; to go $\chi^2 = 19$; to try $\chi^2 = 18$; side $\chi^2 = 17$; solution $\chi^2 = 16$; to come $\chi^2 = 14$; confident $\chi^2 = 14$; to find $\chi^2 = 12$
Cat. 2	difficult $\chi^2 = 36$; to stop $\chi^2 = 23$; position $\chi^2 = 21$; meeting $\chi^2 = 20$; couple $\chi^2 = 19$; moment $\chi^2 = 19$; finally $\chi^2 = 17$; to feel $\chi^2 = 16$; to accept $\chi^2 = 15$; violent $\chi^2 = 14$; table $\chi^2 = 13$; capable $\chi^2 = 13$; level $\chi^2 = 12$; to excuse $\chi^2 = 12$; place $\chi^2 = 11$; impression $\chi^2 = 11$; personality $\chi^2 = 11$
Cat. 3	true $\chi^2 = 92$; time $\chi^2 = 52$; get along $\chi^2 = 30$; reformul $\chi^2 = 27$; word $\chi^2 = 26$; to reach $\chi^2 = 25$; thing $\chi^2 = 24$; understanding $\chi^2 = 21$; to discuss $\chi^2 = 21$; to move forward $\chi^2 = 18$; to succeed $\chi^2 = 15$; to understand $\chi^2 = 15$; easy $\chi^2 = 14$; patient $\chi^2 = 13$; agreement $\chi^2 = 12$

This discourse first enables us to better understand the objectives in mediation or, more precisely, how the mediators perceive the objective sought by the people in conflict (see Table 2, category 1): "People try more to find solutions than to talk about it a long time" (AMQ). "In mediation, we just say 'sit down at the table, we're going to talk calmly, and we're going to try to find the solutions that are the best for you'" (EL).

The most significant lexical forms also identified elements that hindered (category 2) and fostered (category 3) the mediation process. In their discourses, in fact, mediators highlighted characteristics of the disputants that may make the practice of mediation more difficult, "There are people who are always aggressive, who don't want to dialogue or share with anyone, so it's much more difficult because the positions [taken] will be much stronger, even if the needs are the same" (MPE).

Conversely, certain techniques or qualities facilitate the mediation process. Mediators used "classic" meeting techniques and emphasized the importance of reformulating. They also noted that inciting disputants to dialogue and regulating that dialogue all require that mediators be patient (even though they may already see the solution), and that they must be patient from the start of the reflection process to whatever the final outcome. "You have to try, when people speak, to reformulate a lot" (DL). "You have to let people think and go at their own pace; I think that the mediator has to follow the pace of the people, but it takes patience every time" (PL). "For me, it's really a success if you get them to talk to each other, whether or not in our presence, but we need to intervene more in order to get them to talk to each other" (EL).

Beyond general theories intended to guide mediation, it is important to consider the mediators' own perception of the situation and the "tips and tricks" (very informal and sometimes unconscious strategies) that they used to deal with situations.

Mediation Models and Styles (Class 2)

Class 2 includes 438 ECUs (17% of the analyzed corpus). It is characteristic of mediators with education in the social sciences, sociology (chi-square = 869), or psychology (chi-square = 66), conducting research in the field of mediation (chi-square = 500) and residing in Canada (chi-square = 114), France (chi-square = 112) or Spain (chi-square = 66).

While in Class 1, the subjects' discourse focused on describing the mediation meeting and was marked by the use of significant action verbs (to talk, to speak, to discuss or to reformulate), Class 2 enables an analysis of the process.

Table 3. *Categories associated with the specific vocabulary of Class 2*

Cat. 1	style $\chi^2 = 116$; transformation $\chi^2 = 65$; direction $\chi^2 = 45$; final $\chi^2 = 42$; really $\chi^2 = 42$; narrative $\chi^2 = 37$; penal $\chi^2 = 35$; hinder $\chi^2 = 33$; process $\chi^2 = 32$; to get closer $\chi^2 = 30$; type $\chi^2 = 30$; reparation $\chi^2 = 27$; opinion $\chi^2 = 21$; to complicate $\chi^2 = 25$; mediation $\chi^2 = 16$
Cat. 2	model $\chi^2 = 81$; role $\chi^2 = 50$; neutrality $\chi^2 = 49$; society $\chi^2 = 36$; evaluation $\chi^2 = 31$; own $\chi^2 = 27$; tool $\chi^2 = 21$; neutral $\chi^2 = 25$; free $\chi^2 = 31$; culture $\chi^2 = 21$; capacity $\chi^2 = 26$; impartial $\chi^2 = 23$; want $\chi^2 = 20$
Cat. 3	resolution $\chi^2 = 87$; way $\chi^2 = 72$; conflict $\chi^2 = 51$; preventive $\chi^2 = 50$; affection $\chi^2 = 42$; element $\chi^2 = 40$; traditional $\chi^2 = 37$; communic $\chi^2 = 37$; close $\chi^2 = 38$; individual $\chi^2 = 36$; method $\chi^2 = 31$; objective $\chi^2 = 30$; rapport $\chi^2 = 27$; company $\chi^2 = 23$; relationship $\chi^2 = 21$

These "mediator-researchers" first distinguished different styles of mediation from a theoretical and practical perspective (Table 3, category 1):

> So I would say that there are three mediation styles that I find really interesting. These are the narrative, transformative, and the humanistic ones. Then, there are all the styles that are used a lot by legal counselors such as problem solving, principled negotiation…I think these are mediations that are very, very directive, very oriented. (MM)

The "humanistic" style is often used in cases termed "serious," for example in prison contexts. This style is based on principles of non-directiveness, non-judgement, and empathy and seeks transformation through dialogue (Umbreit, 1997).

They also commented on the impact of these styles in terms of effectiveness or relevance:

> So now, for example lawyers will practice the Harvard method, because they deal with cases of companies, contracts and all that. But I think it's not very good for a mediator to be too specialized. Even in the same field, there are differences. (MPE)

This refers to principled negotiation (Fisher & Ury, 1981) as mentioned above. "I think that the more the style is directive, the less mediation will, perhaps, enable the mediated parties to be well served by the process. (MM)"

They also reflected on the theory of mediation and its place in our societies (Table 3, category 2):

> The well-known principles of impartiality, neutrality, and equity are debatable. I believe in fairness but not in neutrality. That's why I don't really like using the term neutrality. On the contrary, I think that mediators are not neutral in any way in relation to their own process and fortunately so, because they believe in [the mediation process]. (MM)

In mediation, if one party has more difficulty expressing him/herself than the other, what are mediators to do? Do they go along with this balance of power and there, respect the principle of neutrality, while knowing that it's not the best in terms of equity, or do they intervene a bit more to rebalance the situation? (FMZ)

Finally, they were asked to consider or reconsider the definition and objectives of mediation: Is mediation always conflict resolution and vice versa? (Table 3, category 3). "Either we have a broad definition of mediation and we say that it includes preventing and resolving conflict, or we choose a definition that is narrower and in my opinion, more realistic" (FMZ). "So actually, it's all this relationship to conflict. Mediation means transforming the view we have of the conflict, to do what it takes to change that view" (JB).

In reflecting about their work and in practice, mediators employed different styles of mediation that were theoretically identified. When encouraged to describe their work, they talked more broadly about the definition of mediation itself.

Education and Professional Support (Class 3)

Class 3 includes 676 ECUs (27% of the analyzed corpus). No illustrative variable is significantly associated with this class: it represents the discourse of all mediators. The discourse of this class mainly refers to what supports practice: education, both initial and continuing, and professional practice discussions.

Table 4. *Categories associated with the specific vocabulary of Class 3*

Cat. 1	service $\chi^2 = 65$; team $\chi^2 = 56$; era $\chi^2 = 40$; to call $\chi^2 = 36$; quebec $\chi^2 = 32$; arrival $\chi^2 = 21$; leader $\chi^2 = 21$; project $\chi^2 = 21$; montreal $\chi^2 = 21$; big $\chi^2 = 22$; boss $\chi^2 = 22$; continual $\chi^2 = 21$
Cat. 2	education $\chi^2 = 194$; work $\chi^2 = 172$; familial $\chi^2 = 114$; social $\chi^2 = 85$; psychologist $\chi^2 = 60$; france $\chi^2 = 45$; diploma $\chi^2 = 38$; luxembourg $\chi^2 = 34$; therapist $\chi^2 = 30$; professional $\chi^2 = 23$
Cat. 3	psychologist $\chi^2 = 60$; universit $\chi^2 = 51$; group $\chi^2 = 43$; career $\chi^2 = 42$; associat $\chi^2 = 40$; course $\chi^2 = 36$; practice $\chi^2 = 32$; day $\chi^2 = 30$; analysis $\chi^2 = 23$

When examining the elements that facilitate and that hamper the mediation process, both mediator-researchers and mediation professionals referred to their education and their peer discussion groups to analyze practices. Participants mentioned their education programs, highlighting the contributions of the social sciences or noting the necessary complementarity of legal studies and social sciences in this area (Table 4, category 2).

We have a different reading than lawyers, I think. Then, in education, in the accreditation process, there's a selection [not everyone gets to be a mediator], education is done by the Bar Association and the School of Social Work. (LQ)

Like any career, it's a job that has to be learned and there are important disciplines [involved]. You can't just make up the law as you go along; as for psychology, it's [more] difficult, because some social workers have a little training in family therapy [and then they think they know everything about psychology]. (JT)

The subjects, particularly in Quebec, also explained the importance of continuing education (Table 4, category 1): "As we have thirty hours to do every two years, in additional training or continuing education, we manage to find a lot of training" (AMQ).

This continuing education can also occur in professional discussion groups for analyzing practices (Table 4, category 3): "There is a need for continuing education, we must update our skills, this is the only profession in France where there is an obligation to have discussion groups to analyze our practices, but no supervision" (JT).

Participation in such groups allowed practitioners to exchange views, and learn different ways of doing things, and procedures and tips to deal with very difficult or emotionally charged situations: "There are very few men in this job, very, very few. I am fortunate to have a practice analysis group which has four men and four women, so it's exceptional" (JT). "[The mediation] brought up a lot of painful memories for me; I had a lot of support in the professional discussion group that helped me put things into perspective" (LM).

Calling on their knowledge, elements that are *a priori* objective and objectifiable, provided guidance and support in their work. Moreover, discussions with peer support groups also seemed to help both the professional (managing emotion) as well as the situation itself (shedding a new light on the conflict and its resolution).

Illustration of the Mediation Process in Practice: Family Mediation (Class 4)

Class 4 consists of 231 ECUs (11% of the analyzed corpus). No illustrative variable is significantly associated with this class (or is excluded): it represents the discourse of all participants. The discourse generally addresses situations of separation, well-known in family mediation, which is perhaps the field most common to mediators.

Table 5. *Categories associated with the specific vocabulary of Class 4*

Cat. 1	child $\chi^2 = 202$; father $\chi^2 = 77$; to separate $\chi^2 = 58$; dialogue $\chi^2 = 38$; mother $\chi^2 = 26$; parental $\chi^2 = 23$; young $\chi^2 = 18$
Cat. 2	money $\chi^2 = 175$; custody $\chi^2 = 163$; child support $\chi^2 = 136$; divorce $\chi^2 = 105$; visitation $\chi^2 = 77$; separation $\chi^2 = 33$; legal $\chi^2 = 33$; to ask $\chi^2 = 30$; law $\chi^2 = 24$; judge $\chi^2 = 14$; court $\chi^2 = 9$
Cat. 3	free $\chi^2 = 147$; information $\chi^2 = 71$; income $\chi^2 = 69$; subsidy $\chi^2 = 68$; meeting $\chi^2 = 65$; ministry $\chi^2 = 50$; justice $\chi^2 = 50$; is responsible for $\chi^2 = 47$; separation $\chi^2 = 42$; client $\chi^2 = 38$; to pay $\chi^2 = 37$; lawyer $\chi^2 = 36$; hour $\chi^2 = 27$; week $\chi^2 = 15$; to give $\chi^2 = 11$; to bring up again $\chi^2 = 9$

When discussing cases of separation, the participants first referred to the people involved directly or indirectly (Table 5, category 1). Children were thus a focus of concern, and maintaining the father-child relationship(s) (still sometimes problematic in our societies) was also an important issue: "Last week, I had a couple of parents of young adults and they asked their children to decide; one decided to remain exclusively with the father" (LQ). "So now, with alternating custody, [there are] the children's needs and actions during separation, children's anger, or a young child's difficulty in being separated from a parent" (LM).

In particular, separation generates problems related to the amount of child support, child custody, and visitation rights (Table 5, category 2):

> The father will perhaps have pay a little more child support than he would have
> had to pay [in court], according to his lawyer, [but] he's perhaps going to win

in the end, because he may have a little more right to see his children than he
would have received from the court. (PL)

"It's often after separation they have problems, it's less about child support, more about
visitation rights, custody, and parental authority" (DL).

Finally, participants emphasized the high cost of trials, particularly in whether
disputants decide to separate with the help of mediators or through the court with lawyers
(Table 5, category 3). This point seemed particularly significant in Quebec, where people may
have access to a mediator for free, while a lawyer there, as in many countries, is very expensive:

Here, we have a subsidized program for mediation. The first sessions, those for
the separation, are funded for five hours. Five free hours for clients and each
year, they can have a two and a half hour consultation with a mediator, two and
a half hours of meetings. (AMQ)

"As a lawyer, I still know lawyers who practice family law and who go to court and there are
fewer and fewer clients who are ready to take on legal battles" (AMQ).

According to the mediators, family mediation was representative of their practices or
was used to illustrate their practice narratives.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand mediators' views on their actual
working practices and the ways in which they understand the effects of those practices on the
mediation process and its outcome. To analyze these views in greater depth, qualitative and
discourse methods (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015; Yu, Jannasch-Penell, & DiGangi, 2011)
were used on semi-structured interviews with professional mediators.

The content analysis performed on 13 interviews with mediators classified a large
proportion (77%) of the corpus into four classes, which by inductive interpretation were
identified as (1) the process of the mediation meeting, (2) mediation models and styles, (3)
mediator education and support, and (4) family mediation. These results, although certainly not
addressing all forms of mediation, did enable however a classification into four themes,
strongly marked by the growing recourse to mediation and recent progress in that field. Thus,
family mediation represented the major domain, a quasi-ideal, prototypical mediation as shown
in a study on the social representations of mediation in Luxembourg (Houssemand, 2008). This
result enables research to focus on this particular field of mediation, since it seems to allow for
generalization to other forms of mediation. The mediator's education and the various styles
and techniques of the mediation meeting also occupied central spaces in the heuristic model of
the mediators' work. This result was expected, as most studies have referred to these factors.

At a more refined level of analysis using the intra-class dendrograms, each of the four
classes also subdivided into three sub-classes or categories, which enabled us to describe
elements of mediation practice and styles and to compare discourses among groups of
mediators with different characteristics. These factors enabled us to map the practices that
mediators referred to in their work. Discourse analysis showed that it was primarily the
objective pursued by the mediator that guided the process and its outcome. The findings
showed that the mediation process and its outcome, as well as the strategies and styles chosen
by mediators, were influenced by mediators' perceptions of their actions and their perceived
self-efficacy in the process. The search for solutions often seemed to be the objective selected
(Class 1, category 1 and Class 2, category 3). This objective was reached, to varying degrees,
by putting the conflict into words and explanations, thus revealing the importance of language,

its change over time, and linguistic style (Donohue & Liang, 2011). Thus, here we find an opposition of practices along a continuum from evaluative mediation to narrative mediation, described above.

Moreover, as in the literature, the mediators pointed to the importance in practice of techniques related to the procedure of the mediation meeting and to certain characteristics such as "patience" (Class 1). Therefore, mediators' intrinsic qualities appear to have practical importance during mediation. More detailed *in situ* studies of their work would help clarify what underlies this type of vocabulary and what this implies from the point of view of practical implementation, even though observing mediators in this way is very difficult to do.

This first class identified in the mediators' discourse – whether they had a background in the social sciences or legal studies – thus revealed the tangible skills involved. The multiple action verbs identified by the discourse analysis clearly referred to communication and interaction (to say, to speak, to discuss, for example), as well as understanding emotions (to feel, to understand, understanding). Indeed, managing emotion (Jameson et al, 2010; Jones & Bodtker, 2001) appears twice (classes 1 and 3) as an essential element, sometimes requiring the intervention of a group or support for the mediator. Participation in a group discussing professional practices did seem to allow mediators to learn by comparing different ways of doing things (both mediation styles and how they were appropriated by the mediators themselves, according to Clot and Faïta, 2000), but also to deal with situations that were sometimes demanding and cognitively and conatively loaded.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that mediators readily questioned the principle of neutrality (Class 2, category 2), already widely discussed in the literature (Beck & Sales, 2000; Cobb & Rifkin, 1991; Cohen et al., 1999). This highlights the difficulty of intervening while at the same time respecting the major theoretical principles mentioned above. We thus see the distance between actual practices and fixed theoretical models. This reveals the importance of mediators' experience and their ability to take a critical view towards fundamental theories that seem too distant from the realities of practice. There is, therefore, a semantic shift between mediation in theory and mediation in practice, although the former supports the latter. Thus, the mediators with a university education knew the existing models well, but in practice, appear to have made choices with regard to the relevance of the model and its effectiveness for people. In the end (Class 2), a non-directive style and giving people the ability to express their representation of the conflict was considered as the most effective and efficient. This point serves to emphasize that, more than conflict itself, it is the representation of the conflict and the change in this representation that is the true work of the mediator and the parties involved.

Moreover, for all the mediators in this study, regardless of their country of origin, background, or research work, the notion of support was essential, both in terms of theory (classes, continuing education, for example) and practice (co-mediation and professional practice analysis groups). This finding highlights the necessity of stepping back, getting perspective, and reflecting on practices as part of mediators' work (Rothman, 2014).

Finally, an important element was hardly discussed during the interviews: the success of the mediation. This result should be particularly emphasized. Indeed, both in the theoretical framework of mediation as well as in academic and practical training, reaching an agreement is regarded as the ultimate and necessary goal of this type of conflict resolution. Yet practitioners seemed to consider it of secondary significance. This may be explained by the difficulty of qualifying and certifying when exactly a conflict can be considered as resolved (Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). Indeed, some research has shown that short-term and long-term effectiveness are not always related (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992) and thus a successful outcome of the mediation process is not always guarantee of success some time afterwards.

Longitudinal follow-up is therefore an essential tool for identifying longer-term effects. Much clearer criteria should be specified as to what constitutes a successful mediation, which

should then be measured if we want to move towards evidence-based practices and optimally help people in conflict. It is also important to take into account and to evaluate all the nuances of the communication processes that make up mediation, and in so doing, avoid limiting ourselves to formal, material criteria such as written agreements. Even in case of non-agreement, the protagonists may have been able to clarify their views or re-open a dialogue that had broken down (Bonafé-Schmitt & Charrier, 2008). Conversely, a written agreement may leave a bitter aftertaste for the protagonists if they believe that their rights were not been respected (Bryan, 1999).

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Article Citation

Pignault, A., Meyers, R., & Houssemand, C. (2017). Mediators' self-perception of their work and practice: Content and lexical analysis. *The Qualitative Report, 22*(6), 1589-1606. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss6/8