



Now and Tomorrow
Excellence in Everything We Do



2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT

OFFICE OF INFORMAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT Employment and Social Development Canada

Improving the Workplace, One Conversation at a Time



The OICM in a Snapshot!

- Bilingual services and trainings
- No charge
- Voluntary and confidential process
- Neutral and impartial third party
- Accessible to employees of ESDC, Elections Canada, Public Safety Canada and the Courts Administration Service
- Offices in Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Fredericton, Edmundston and Gatineau.

I am pleased to present the 7th Annual Report of the Office of Informal Conflict Management. As in previous years, the report covers relevant information on the use of the OICM's services and on its achievements.

*Michel Nadeau
Director, OICM*

The Office of Informal Conflict Management (OICM) at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) supports employees in their efforts to improve their work environment by offering them positive and effective ways to resolve their disputes so that, through their interactions, all employees can reach their maximum performance.

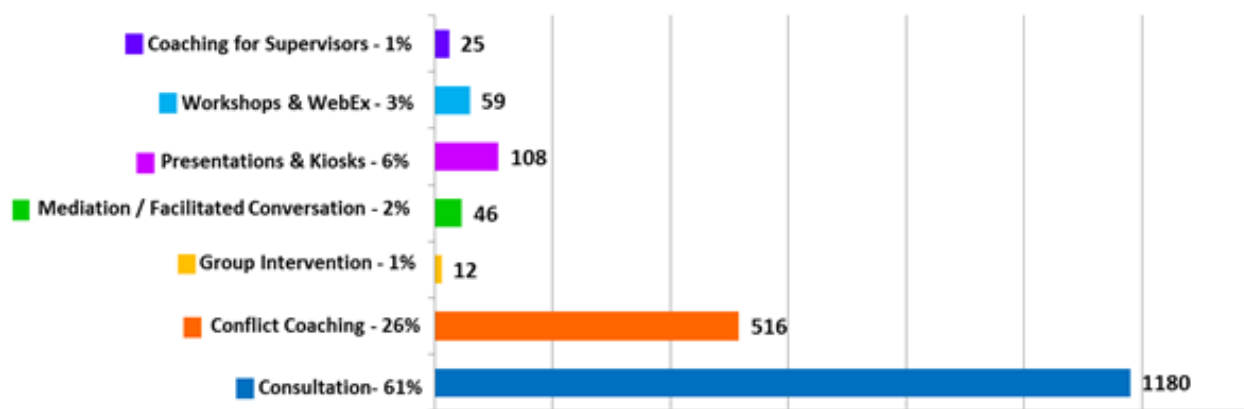
FROM INTERVENTION TO PREVENTION

During 2015-2016, the OICM celebrated its ninth year of operation. Since its creation, the OICM has expanded its range of options, from intervention-based services (such as facilitated conversation, mediation and group interventions) to activities focused on the sharing of conflict management skills (particularly through coaching). The move toward prevention was done gradually to better meet the needs of employees and the Department. Today, the OICM is an experienced organization that offers a full range of options which support ESDC in its objective of providing a healthy workplace to its employees.

USE OF THE OICM'S SERVICES IN 2015-2016

The OICM delivered 1,946 services (Fig. 1) in 2015-2016.

Figure 1 – Number of Resolution and Prevention Services Offered



Consultations and coaching sessions (individual, team or group) represent 87% of the services offered, as employees first attempt to resolve the conflict themselves. Sometimes they do not know what to do, but other times they simply need to have their approach validated and feel confident about implementing it. Coaching is one of the most effective ways to empower these employees, which is why the OICM puts so much emphasis on this service.

Mediation and facilitated conversation are still available to employees who need a safe, respectful and confidential discussion forum in order to re-establish trust among themselves. Mediation can also be used as a means to resolve the subject of a grievance or complaint. The OICM'S mediators have found that strained relationships are often at the core of grievances and complaints. By approaching a situation in a constructive way, the parties increase their chances of finding a mutually agreeable solution.

In 2015-2016, 90% of grievances or complaints that went to mediation were withdrawn—equivalent to 18 out of 20.

Although they represent only 1% of the services offered, group processes require the most time due to a greater number of people implicated. When a client requests a group intervention, the informal conflict management practitioner will try to learn more about the motivations underlying the request. Often, the problem will concern two people, in which case mediation is more appropriate. Other times, coaching sessions will be proposed for the entire management team (director, managers and team leaders), so that they can address the situation in a concerted and cohesive manner.

PREVENTION SERVICES

Presentations, workshops and coaching programs for supervisors account for 192 services offered.

Both coaching programs for supervisors (Conflict Management and Performance Management) generate considerable interest. The same can be said for the new pilot project on Mental Health Learning Circles. Overall, 25 cohorts were delivered, all programs combined.

The presentations and workshops (virtual or in-person) remain popular OICM activities and reach the widest audience. Whether the topic covers the services offered, group interventions, myths and behaviours with respect to conflict, interpersonal relationships in performance management—all are compelling reasons to reach out to employees. Other activities include the WebEx workshops *Behaviours in Conflict Situations* and *Working with Resistance in our Relationships*, which were delivered 26 times this year.

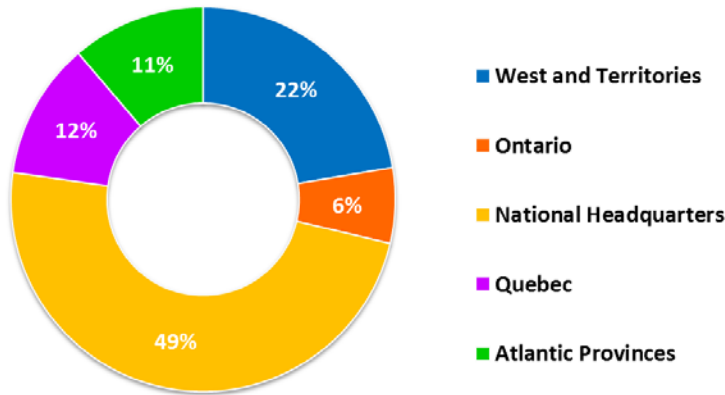
The OICM also provides service to government agencies with which it has signed service agreements. It is possible to help these organizations, which have the will but lack the capacity to offer informal conflict management services, while maintaining timely and quality services for departmental employees and maximizing positive effects for the Department as a whole.

NUMBER OF USERS

The OICM serviced 3150 employees across the country. Of that number, 613 employees contacted the OICM to get resolution services with a specific situation; 2050 participated at OICM presentations and workshops, 222 managers of all levels took part at our coaching programs and 265 employees followed WebEx workshops.

National Headquarters (Gatineau/Ottawa) employees are main users of OICM with 49% of utilization, all services combined (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Number of OICM services users per region



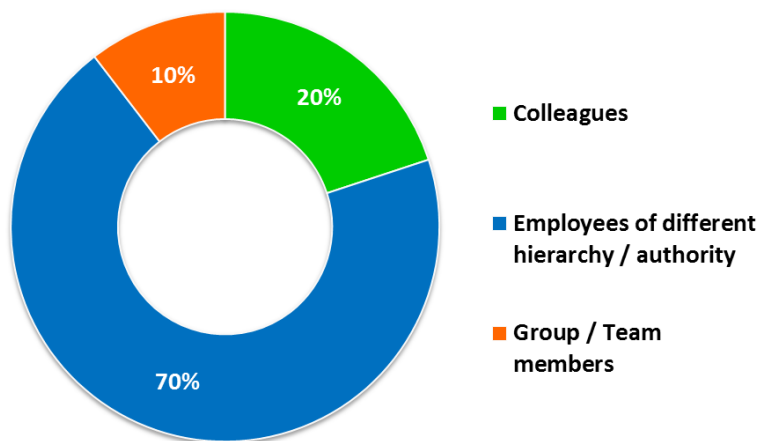
FINDINGS

OICM gathers information to learn more about the reason why employees contact the office as well as the relationship with the person with whom they have a conflict.

It comes as no surprise that the majority of conflicts are between employees and their managers (Fig. 3). This has been found consistently over the years and is similar to what has been observed in other departments. Relational conflicts and conflicts related to performance or productivity represent 79% of all conflicts observed by the OICM (Fig. 4). Taken together, these two findings easily suggest that the majority of OICM clients come because of interpersonal difficulties with an employee of a different hierarchal level. Two statistics from external publications tend to support this:

- Interpersonal issues are a greater source of stress than job demands such as deadlines.¹
- 65% of performance problems result from strained relationships between employees—not from deficits in employees’ skill or motivation.²

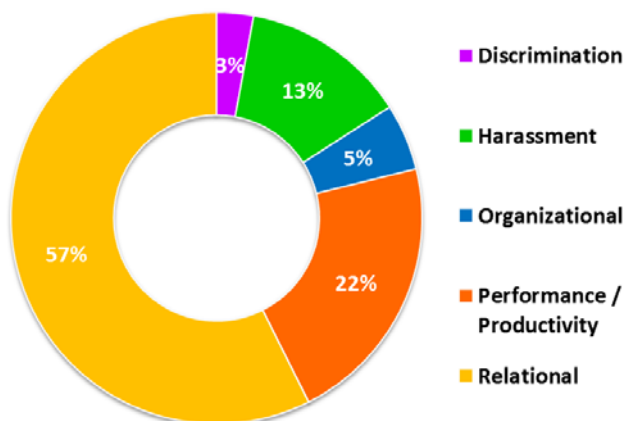
Figure 3 – Relationships Between the Parties



¹ *Workplace Mental Health Priorities: 2016* – Morneau Shepell research group.

² Dana, Dan (online), *The Dana Measure of Financial Cost of Organizational Conflict*, 2001.

Figure 4 – Nature of the Conflict



These findings support the OICM’s pursuit of its objective to provide employees and managers with tools to improve their relationships with one another. Whether through WebEx workshops or coaching programs for supervisors, all these activities include interactive exercises and assignments that enable participants to apply what they have learned—a key element in developing conflict resolution skills.

FEEDBACK FROM OICM USERS

The rate of satisfaction with the OICM’s services is typically around 90%, year after year (see Table 1). Although these numbers reflect practitioners’ professional work and experience in informal conflict management, the success of an intervention cannot be measured in percentage alone. A sincere handshake between two parties at the end of a mediation, a person who realizes that their actions play a greater role in the conflict than they thought, or a manager who feels confident approaching a difficult conversation with an employee are all indicators of success.

“During my 13 years in the federal government, I have never participated in sessions as informative and interesting as your conference calls.”

– Coaching group participant

"I developed new skills that have helped me to deal differently with work situations involving employees or managers."
- OICM User

The data are drawn from an online and anonymous assessment system that is accessible via the OICM intranet site.

Table 1 Feedback Questionnaire Response Rate

RESPONDENTS	QUESTION
90%	Satisfied with the OICM's intervention in improving their situation.
89%	Feel better equipped to manage conflict situations.
96%	Find that the practitioner was neutral and impartial.
94%	Satisfied with their overall experience at the OICM.
100%	Recommend the OICM's services to other employees.

OICM ACHIEVEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

From the very beginning, the OICM has developed many products and approaches that have been shared across the federal public service. This year again, numerous collaborations and pilot projects were launched:

- The Mental Health Learning Circles are the result of an initiative that stems directly from the implementation of the *Integrated Framework on Mental Health*. The pilot project was launched in fall 2015 to give managers an opportunity to discuss mental health issues affecting their employees and how to address these issues with them. In light of the project's success, the offer will be extended in a new format—the *Coaching Program for Supervisors on Mental Health*—and will be offered starting in 2016-2017.

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- Also new this year, ESDC's Mentoring Program allowed 58 participant mentors, from levels EX-01 to EX-05, to benefit from the expertise of OICM coaches by giving them the opportunity to participate in mentor-mentee meetings and share their observations. The mentors also benefitted from group coaching. As a result of this successful collaboration, the OICM will continue to participate in the Mentorship Program.
 - The OICM joined the Values and Ethics team in facilitating the *Respectful Workplace* presentation (33 times during the year) and will continue to do so in the future.
 - Again this year, emphasis was placed on the delivery of virtual services to reach as many departmental employees as possible. The OICM increased its delivery of workshops with the WebEx platform, in addition to focusing on videoconference and webcam presentations. One presentation reached more than 390 people online.

THE INFORMAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (ICMS): CENTRAL TO A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

For several years now, the federal public service has seen improved integration of informal conflict management into policies that govern employees' well-being: the *Policy on Harassment Prevention and Resolution*, *Common Human Resources Business Processes* (including grievances and complaints), the *Values and Ethics Code*, the *Mental Health Framework* and *Performance Management*. This integration did not just happen. It demonstrates the relevance and complementary nature of the ICMS in the government's workplace wellness strategy, and indicates a change of culture where dialogue has returned to the core of interpersonal relationships among employees.

This strategy is in line with what numerous US and Canadian studies have shown in recent years: the direct link between workplace wellness programs and employee effectiveness³. Other benefits, such as an increase in productivity and a decrease in absenteeism, disability claims, legal fees and turnover rates, are also possible outcomes. Cost-savings are significant, and the organization only stands to gain.

³ 2011 Buffett National Wellness Survey. The Health and Productivity Advantage Study, 2009/2010 Staying@Work Report, initially published by Watson Wyatt Worldwide.

All the OICM's activities and achievements contribute to the same objective: to improve the workplace for employees. The results for 2015-2016 show that the OICM is on the right track. There is more, however. Achieving this objective is intrinsically linked to the skillful and well-honed collaboration of all stakeholders who, like the OICM, are working to build a healthy workplace. Considerable collaborative effort has already been invested on all sides, but more needs to be done. The OICM remains firmly committed to continuing this work in the coming years.