



Now and Tomorrow  
Excellence in Everything We Do



**NATIONAL TRENDS REPORT  
FOR THE MONTHS OF JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2018**

**Prepared by: the Office of Informal Conflict Management (OICM),  
Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)**

*NOTE: The following information provided herein is solely the opinions and observations of OICM Practitioners and Coordinators. If any of these trends observed is occurring in your branch, we invite you to contact OICM to explore how we could be of assistance.*

## CONTEXT

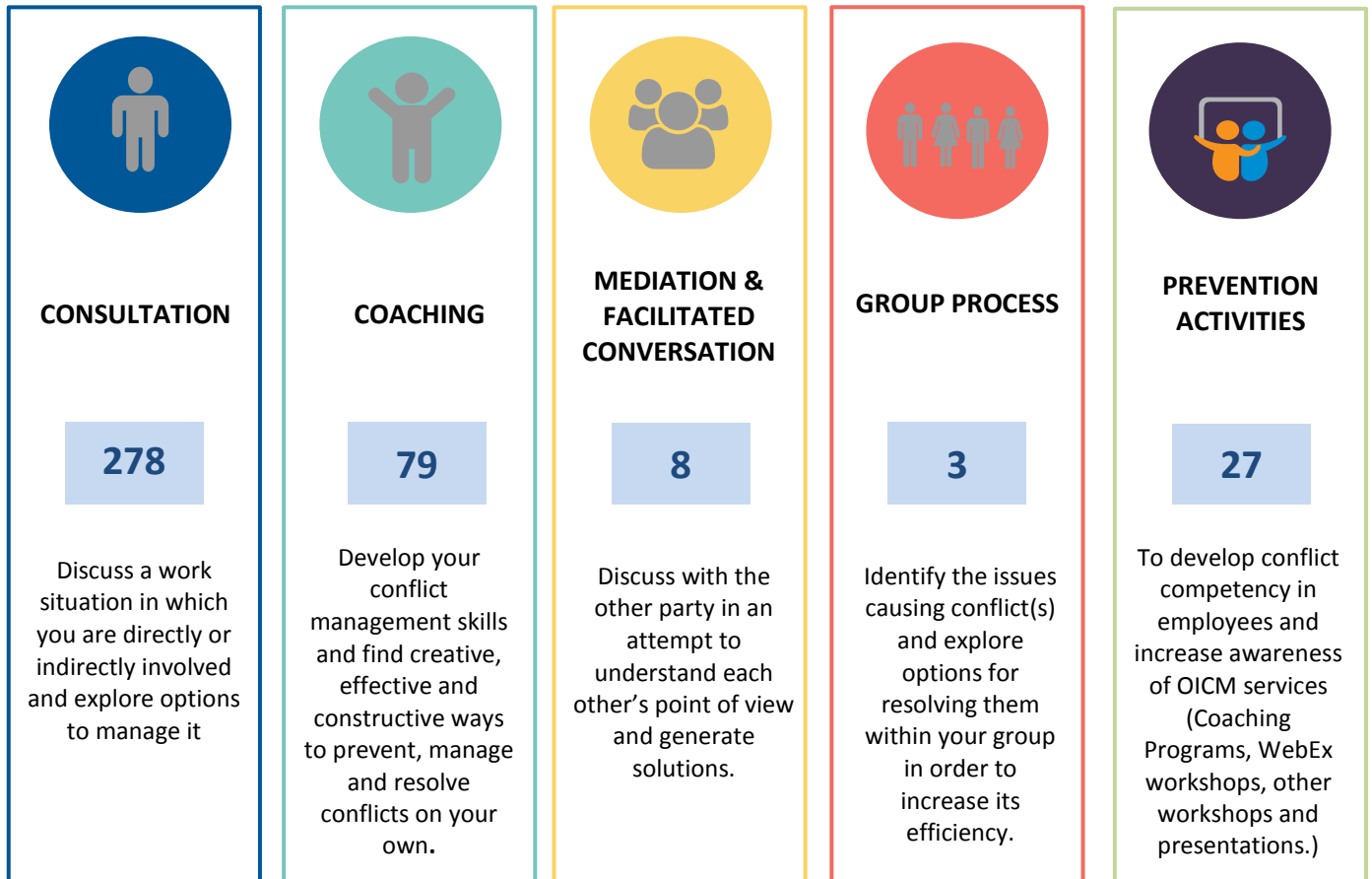
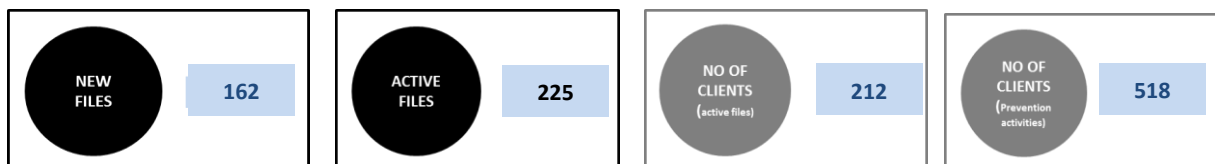
In 2005, the new *Public Service Labour Relations Act* (PSLRA) came into effect, whereby every Deputy Head of the core public administration must, in consultation with the bargaining agents, establish an Informal Conflict Management System (ICMS).

At Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the Office of Informal Conflict Management (OICM) provides ICMS services for all employees, including Service Canada and the Labour Program. OICM's guiding principles include: neutrality, confidentiality, voluntary, timeliness and good faith.

OICM has launched an initiative to gather information from its practitioners and coordinators in order to develop a quarterly trends report, identifying observed trends that have the potential to lead to conflict in various areas of the organization. This document provides the fourth quarterly report, being published in fiscal year 2017-18.

## STATISTICS

### 2017-18 4th Quarter (January 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31, 2018)



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## **NATIONAL AND/OR REGIONAL TRENDS**

### **Performance Management**

OICM Practitioners observed an increase in the demand for informal conflict management services to assist supervisors in preparing for performance management discussions, in order to be better prepared to effectively provide sensitive or corrective feedback.

(Confirmed by all Regions)

### **Mental Health**

Addressing mental health issues at the workplace continues to be an area of concern for supervisors; including:

- apprehension/anxiety around speaking about mental health;
- not knowing how to approach employees about possible mental health concerns affecting their work performance;
- unable to relay their concerns effectively during conversations related to duty to accommodate;
- wanting a better understanding of mental health and the manner in which a person suffering from mental health issues may react when they perceive something as a threat, as reactions may vary among individuals; and,
- dealing with employees with possible mental health issues, who are displaying behaviours that could be interpreted as harassment, intimidation or inappropriate behaviour in the workplace.

(Confirmed by all Regions)

### **Tension between Employees and Managers**

A certain level of tension exists between some employees and their managers. A factor that may exacerbate this includes managers having a lower classification level than their direct reports. In these situations, some employees may overstep authority and tell managers how to manage, using their accreditation, education and expertise as subject matter experts, to subvert their manager.

(Confirmed by all Regions)

### **OICM Requested to convey messages on behalf of Managers**

Managers requesting services from OICM practitioners to attend meetings/sessions with their employees, to convey sensitive messaging on their behalf has recently been observed. As this responsibility lies within the manager's role, OICM Practitioners will offer to guide these managers through coaching, to help the manager identify the issues they want to raise and the approach they want to use with staff. All OICM Practitioners must, at all times, ensure that real and perceived neutrality is maintained with all clients.

(Confirmed by all Regions)

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## **PATH FORWARD**

OICM has posted and distributed a schedule of upcoming training sessions and program activities. The overall objective is to continue to better equip employees and managers in preventing and managing conflict, as well as preventing conflicts from escalating in the workplace.

[http://iservice.prv/eng/hr/oicm/topics/training\\_employees.shtml](http://iservice.prv/eng/hr/oicm/topics/training_employees.shtml)

Training and program offerings will include products and approaches that respond to trends observed nationally. For example, analysis of trends observed over the past 9 months suggests that communication challenges within teams are constantly at the heart of many issues.

## **FOLLOW-UP ON PREVIOUS TRENDS**

### **Supervisors in new/or acting positions**

- Group service requests may be used as a way to address specific issues with an employee, in hopes that this employee will indirectly receive the message to behave differently.

Next steps: Given that one of the primary roles of OICM practitioners is to assess service requests and determine the best approach to addressing an issue, practitioners will remain mindful of this trend and continue to ensure that they use a consultative approach and that they obtain the necessary information by asking open-ended questions to align with the most appropriate service.

### **Front-end staff**

- It is challenging for front-end staff to access training from OICM due to set hours in the Service Centers; this can contribute to limited opportunities for them to improve their communication skills. Additionally, the Program and Administration Services Collective Agreement (PA) introduced a new Article (58.02), whereby all call centre employees are now entitled to a minimum of two (2) days a year to undergo work-related training, including strengthening their coping skills.

Next steps: OICM has received several requests for training and presentations in response to this new requirement. Following a more in-depth analysis, OICM will focus on developing a training plan, in collaboration with the Office of Values and Ethics (OVE), to assist telecentres in meeting this new requirement. OICM will also establish contacts at the corporate level to obtain data related to the challenges of frontline employees and explore innovative ways of provide training and awareness to this community.

### **Business Expertise Advisor's**

- Business Expertise Advisor's (BEAs) are frequently experiencing conflict when providing feedback to their client group.

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Next Steps - OICM:

- Has established a contact with a learning consultant in HRSB at the Service Canada College. The contact will be responsible for the BEA's portfolio to develop a training plan that would include OICM and College offerings.
- Will develop a promotional tool to be distributed to all BEAs, highlighting training that is currently available (WebEx training, Coaching Attitude workshops, etc.) and establish a conflict coaching program tailored specifically for BEAs. This will assist them in learning how to manage or prevent difficult situations from occurring while performing their duties.