

# Leadership Dialogue 2020

**Acknowledging Dignity  
through Civility:**  
How can I communicate  
for a more harmonious  
workplace?

PARTICIPANTS' GUIDE AND MATERIALS

## Participant Instructions

Before participating in this year's Leadership Dialogue, we kindly ask that you familiarize yourself with the following references:

[Preamble to the UN Charter](#)

[Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service](#)

[United Nations Competencies for the Future](#)

[Staff Regulations 1.2\(a\)\(b\)](#)

[Addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority](#)

[2019 Senior Managers Compacts, Section 2 \(B\)](#)

[Promoting Dignity and Respect in the Workplace, HR Toolkit](#)

[UNOMS iSeek Article: Just Words](#)

[UNOMS iSeek Article: Productive Email Exchanges](#)

[UNOMS Take 5 Cards](#)

Please remember to actively participate, ask questions and contribute relevant examples and discuss relevant situations that you may know of or have heard about. After the session, please consider sharing with the Ethics Office your ideas on how to improve the Leadership Dialogue and suggestions for next year's topic.

Special note on COVID-19: At the time of preparing this Dialogue, the world was experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are participating in this Dialogue at a time and place where COVID-19 measures, such as social distancing, are in place, we expect you to observe these measures and take part in the Dialogue through creative means such as video/audio teleconferencing through Microsoft Teams or through telephone call in areas with low bandwidth. To ensure accurate reporting, be sure to be counted by the appointed colleague to note down names of participants if the sessions are done remotely and sign-in sheets cannot be utilized.

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## Welcome to the United Nations Leadership Dialogue

Thank you for participating in the 2020 United Nations Leadership Dialogue. This annual event is an important opportunity for you and your colleagues to discuss topics with great meaning for our work, particularly as we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations.

Each year, every senior leader conducts a guided Dialogue with their staff, who in turn lead their own direct reports in a similar discussion, until every United Nations staff member has participated in the Dialogue. The first such Dialogue in 2013 addressed what it means to be an international civil servant, while last year's exercise focused on the importance of maintaining public trust by mitigating risks that could arise from personal interests and circumstances.

This year, the Leadership Dialogue will be held under the theme, *Acknowledging Dignity through Civility: How can I communicate for a more harmonious workplace?* The principles of dignity and civility are essential to promoting a healthy, rewarding, vibrant and productive work environment. A key dimension of practicing civility is to create a respectful environment for providing constructive feedback and for challenging ideas, not people. This year's Dialogue is an opportunity to shift mindsets and to explore a new possible dynamic of workplace interactions.

Respectful and civil communications are all the more important during challenging times, such as those resulting from the current COVID-19 pandemic. I invite all United Nations personnel to actively participate in what I hope will be a rewarding undertaking.

**António Guterres**

Secretary-General

## Introduction to the Leadership Dialogue

### Welcome to the 2020 Leadership Dialogue.

We chose this year's topic, "Acknowledging Dignity through Civility" based on the Secretary-General's emphasis on our responsibility to create a more effective and harmonious work environment. This year's Leadership Dialogue is part of the Secretary-General's initiative on fostering civility at all levels within the UN. It continues the work done by the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services (UNOMS) on the same topic through its "C3" workshops and Civility Cafés.

We are fortunate to work for an Organization that has the concept of dignity enshrined in its foundational documents, such as the Preamble to the UN Charter, which reaffirms faith in the dignity and worth of the human person. [Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares](#), "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations this year, we can also acknowledge the dignity and worth of our colleagues by consistently engaging in civil communication and behaviour.

Your manager will take you through a discussion that covers the following topics:

1. Providing performance feedback in an appropriate tone and setting;
2. Preventing conflict in the workplace through civil communication;
3. Demonstrating that civility fosters dialogue that challenges ideas but not people, allowing staff to work more effectively in a harmonious environment; and
4. Avoiding negative impacts upon a colleague's dignity and the team's ability to work effectively because there is a lack of civil communication, with more scope for misunderstanding when communication moves online or is conducted remotely.

This Participant's Guide serves as a reference guide before, during and after the Leadership Dialogue. It contains some important points that will be discussed in this year's Leadership Dialogue, reference material and contact information.

## What Are Dignity and Civility?

Civility, for the purposes of this Dialogue, is the consistent acknowledgment of dignity in the workplace. It provides a framework for providing one another with more effective feedback to help us better understand the consequences of our actions. Some factors that often arise when thinking about dignity, include but are not limited to: acceptance of identity, recognition, acknowledgement, inclusion, psychological safety, fairness and understanding (Hicks, D. (2011). *Dignity It's Essential Role in Resolving Conflict*. Yale University Press).

If dignity refers to the inherent value and worth that all human beings possess, then the acknowledgment of dignity establishes a baseline beneath which none of should us fall. Civility, on the other hand, is a set of behaviours that allow us to consistently acknowledge the dignity of others. In this way, dignity and civility gives us the framework for providing one another with more robust and effective feedback.

## **Case Scenarios**

**BELOW ARE THE CASE SCENARIOS TO BE DISCUSSED  
IN THIS YEAR'S LEADERSHIP DIALOGUE.**

## SCENARIO 1: DIFFERING TREATMENT

Chikondi is a Director managing an office of 20 people. Within her office, there are two teams each headed by P5 unit leads Seung-hye and Ahmed. Each unit has eight members and the remaining four colleagues provide administrative support.

Every week, Chikondi posts an article on the office's Teams page, which is only accessible to the office's staff. She often uses this opportunity to highlight things that the teams have done well and on those that the team needs to improve. In last week's article, she praised Ahmed's team for its timely delivery of outputs while pointing out that Seung-hye's team was lagging in its delivery, without specifying on which outputs.

Earlier this week, at a general staff meeting, during the tour-de-table, when unit leads provide updates on their team's work, Chikondi interrupted Seung-hye's presentation on a programme she works on, to point out that the Executive Office had expressed concern that the programme was very expensive to run. She did not follow this comment up with any suggestions or requests, but asked Seung-hye to proceed with her presentation. Ahmed, making his presentation, reported that, despite an unprecedented upsurge in requests for his team's services, his team had managed to take the challenge head on and reduce request response rates. Chikondi asked everyone to clap their hands at this news.

Later that morning, four officers from a non-UN entity joined the meeting to give a briefing on the work that they do which was similar to the work carried out by Chikondi's office. After they shared their work and impressive data on a programme which resembled the one for which Seung-hye was responsible, Chikondi stepped in and went on a prolonged critique of Seung-hye's performance, personally blaming her for failing to deliver comparable outputs. The critique was backed by facts and evidence.

Chikondi, Seung-hye and Ahmed also hold weekly leadership meetings which are aimed at sorting out administrative and managerial issues. Chikondi also meets the unit leads one-on-one from time to time to discuss any sensitive or performance issues. While Chikondi has never privately confronted Seung-hye about her performance before, at the last leadership meeting (the day after the general staff meeting), she criticized Seung-hye about what she perceived to be her lack of leadership skills, citing complaints she had just received from Seung-hye's team members that morning. She also praised Ahmed for his innovative spirit, making reference to certain initiatives that he and his team had introduced.

Later that day, Chikondi privately apologized to Seung-hye for her criticism, explaining that she got emotionally worked up with the complaints and failed to exercise patience to have a sit-down with Seung-hye. Chikondi calmly explained the complaints that she had received from the team and pointed out several specific areas where she felt that Seung-hye needed to improve, providing concrete suggestions for the same. Seung-hye however was defensive, accusing Chikondi of being unfair.

Seung-hye feels embarrassed by what she considers to be Chikondi's "constant attempts to publicly humiliate her". She has begun to suffer from anxiety and has resorted to taking sick days to avoid facing Chikondi and her colleagues. It has also been observed that staff members have been gossiping about the apparent difference in treatment that Chikondi has been showing between Seung-hye and Ahmed. Together, these factors appear to be negatively affecting Seung-hye's team's morale and delivery of outputs.

## Reference materials

- [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, Sections 16, 17, 18](#)
- [United Nations Competencies for the Future](#) – Professionalism, Respect for Diversity, Leadership, Empowering Others, Building Trust, Managing Performance
- [Staff Regulations 1.2\(a\)](#)
- [Addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority](#)
- [2019 Senior Managers Compacts, Section 2 \(B\)](#)
- [ST/AI/2010/5, Performance Management and Development System](#), Sections 2.1(d), 5.4, 11.2



## SCENARIO 2: TEAM TENSIONS

Juan, Bibek, Nema and Lupita all work in a team. Juan and Bibek are G-level national staff and have been working in the office for several years. Nema and Lupita are P-level international staff and transferred to the office from other UN assignments within the last three years. They all report to Janella.

The following behaviours have started to become commonplace:

- Lupita talks about Juan behind his back and openly speaks to others in the team about her dislike of Janella, saying that Janella works too slowly in the office and should retire soon.
- Juan does not welcome Nema and Lupita's constructive feedback on his work and often argues with Janella regarding the tasks assigned to him and the instructions given to him by her.
- Bibek often tells Nema that because she is relatively new to the office, she doesn't know how things work and she does not understand the mandate of the office. Bibek often uses Nema's age as a reason for discrediting her and her prior experience. He makes comments such as "when I drafted this SOP, Nema was probably still in school!"
- Bibek and Juan regularly have lunch and coffee together. In the cafeteria, they can often be heard speaking negatively of Janella and gossiping about Nema and Lupita. Other colleagues outside of the team often hear these comments but have not reported back to Janella or to anyone else.
- Face-to-face meetings are uncommon. Team members do not greet one another, and team discussions are also uncommon. Most interaction occurs through e-mail, even though the colleagues sit within steps of one another.
- Janella does not confront members of the team when she overhears them make negative comments about other team members or when they challenge her instructions or feedback.

The direct supervisor of Janella has sent her an email stating that her team has fallen behind on their deliverables for this work cycle and asking her if the team dynamics are contributing to delay in deliverables. In an e-mail reply, Janella notes that she does not believe staff need to like one another in order to achieve results; therefore, these behaviours are not the cause of the delay in producing the deliverables. She promises to "crack the whip" (the words she used in her email) in order to make up for the delay.

## Reference materials

- [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, Sections 16, 17, 18](#)
- [United Nations Competencies for the Future](#) – Integrity, Professionalism, Communication, Teamwork, Leadership, Building Trust, Judgment
- [Staff Regulations 1.2\(a\)\(b\)](#)
- [Addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority](#)
- [2019 Senior Managers Compacts, Section 2 \(B\)](#)
- [Promoting Dignity and Respect in the Workplace, HR Toolkit, p.5 & 11](#)

### SCENARIO 3: UNWANTED FEEDBACK FROM A WELL-INTENTIONED COLLEAGUE?

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Elena is working for the UN at a duty station which has been the epicentre for a pandemic, resulting in telecommuting measures following a local “stay at home” order meant to curtail disease spread. She works hard and appears committed to improving herself and the work of the team on which she works. Her colleagues and supervisors have often commented that they can rely on her to meet deadlines with consistently good quality outputs. In video teleconferences, which have become her office’s main method of holding team meetings, she often provides her impressions to the rest of the team about how they can collectively improve their work processes while staying mentally healthy during the stressful pandemic.

In a recent staff team meeting, she provided feedback to her FRO, Ragip, about ways that he can improve his own work after he casually indicated to the team that he was not adapting well to remote work and the telecommuting way of life. Ragip, in his response to her, called her a “backseat driver” and then gave out a perceived “fake laugh” to dissipate the resulting tension. However, colleagues noticed that he had appeared edgy and offended when the teleconferencing camera was on him as he spoke these words. Unbeknownst to Elena, Ragip was having family problems and had been experiencing additional stress brought upon by the stay at home order, hence his issues with telecommuting.

Elena felt a bit taken aback by these comments, considering that her supervisor was normally cheerful before the telecommuting arrangements. She felt that she could not respond to such a public rebuke in a staff meeting, so she did not say anything further. However, she had felt somewhat offended and thought that it was an unnecessary rebuke at her attempts to help a colleague.

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During the following two weeks, Elena’s performance began to decline compared to her usual efficient and collaborative manner. She often logged in late for work, missed deadlines and failed to respond to emails from the team in a timely manner. During video teleconferences, her video was usually switched off and she rarely responded to Team chats, which were introduced in an effort to enhance team communications.

During a performance review conducted remotely on video chat, Ragip, assuming that Elena's poor performance was due to an elevated sense of self-importance resulting in a lack of team spirit, tells her: "Your work is really starting to suffer. I am trying to be understanding, but we have a big deadline coming up and the team needs a staff member who is fully dedicated. If things don't improve immediately, I am going to have to put you on a Performance Improvement Plan." He hoped that his feedback would serve to motivate Elena to get back on track to her usual work standard. Ragip had tried his best not to appear hostile as he delivered this message to Elena so that she would know that he was simply executing his duties impartially as her supervisor but was remaining confident in her abilities. However, owing to poor network connection which affected the video and audio quality of the communication, all of the positive emotions intended, was lost in translation.

Consequently, Elena becomes unsure of what Ragip meant by "I am trying to be understanding" but she fails to ask him to elaborate or explain. Unbeknownst to Ragip, Elena had also been undergoing a difficult personal situation under the current circumstances. Her elderly mother who lives with her, had fallen ill approximately two weeks ago, and Elena is terrified that she might have become a victim of the pandemic which can be fatal for her mother's age group. Her time, energy and attention had been diverted searching for medical personnel to test her mother so she could obtain appropriate medical care, but tests for the illness, which is new, had not been available.

Offended by Ragip's feedback which she considers heartless under her current situation, she assumes that Ragip is "retaliating" for their interaction at the meeting two weeks ago. She complains against him to HR, accusing him of abuse of authority.

## Reference materials

- [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, Sections 16, 17, 18](#)
- [United Nations Competencies for the Future](#) – Communication, Teamwork, Accountability, Managing Performance, Leadership, Building Trust, Judgment
- [Addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority](#)
- [2019 Senior Managers Compacts, Section 2 \(B\)](#)
- [Promoting Dignity and Respect in the Workplace, HR Toolkit, p. 5 & 11](#)

# OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS OMBUDSMAN & MEDIATION SERVICES



Is someone's  
behaviour upsetting you?  
**"Take 5"**

## The Ombudsman "take 5" conversation

Is someone's behaviour  
upsetting you?

Here are five practical  
actions to help you have  
a conversation about it.

### 1 **pause,** then approach

Take time alone to  
think and re-center.

Next, ask for an  
appointment to speak  
together, undisturbed,  
and explain why you  
would like to have a  
conversation.

### 2 **state the facts**

During the conversation,  
describe the situation  
and what happened that  
bothered you.

Be factual.

Avoid judgments or  
opinions.

### 3 **describe the impact**

Describe the impact of  
the behaviour on you.

Do not assign blame  
or make assumptions.

Use "I" statements.

### 4 **explain your motivation**

Explain why you are  
bringing it up.

Extend the "benefit of  
the doubt": the other  
person may not be  
aware of the impact of  
his or her behaviour.

### 5 **request behavioural change**

Make a request for a  
change in behaviour.

Focus on behaviour  
and not values or  
personality.

And be ready to listen  
to the other person.

### ? **Have a concern or question?**

The Office of the UN  
Ombudsman and Mediation  
Services is here to help  
resolve a wide-range of  
work-related issues. We are

- Confidential
- Impartial
- Independent
- Informal

**Contacting  
an Ombudsman is  
a safe first step.**

[un.org/ombudsman](https://un.org/ombudsman)

Email:  
[unoms@un.org](mailto:unoms@un.org)

Bangkok		Entebbe
Geneva		Goma
Nairobi		New York
Santiago		Vienna

## Leadership Dialogue Contact Information

**Enquiries to the Ethics Office are confidential. If you are unsure about the right course of action, ask for advice. The Ethics Office will provide confidential guidance on ethical issues.**

(For timely advice, please approach the Ethics Office as soon as possible with all pertinent information.)

### United Nations Ethics Office

Ethics Helpline: +1 (917) 367-9858

Fax: +1 (917) 367-9861

Email: [ethicsoffice@un.org](mailto:ethicsoffice@un.org)

[www.un.org/en/ethics](http://www.un.org/en/ethics)

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Also, please consult these resources, available on our website:

[\*Putting Ethics to Work: A Guide for UN Staff\*](#)

[\*The Roadmap: A Staff Member's Guide to Finding the Right Place\*](#)