Jenkins, M. (2011). Practice note: Is mediation suitable for complaints of workplace bullying?. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 29,* 1, 25-38.

In this article, Jenkins draws on literature to explore if mediation is an appropriate response to workplace bullying. Although research shows that the main approach taken by organizations is some form of conciliation, there continues to be debate as to whether this is an appropriate course of action. One sticking point in the debate is that there is no agreed upon definition of *bullying.* The following definitions of bullying are offered:

1) Repeated exposure to negative behaviors that are specifically directed at a target or a group of targets.
2) Any repeated behaviors that target an employee or group of employees, that a reasonable person, taking into account all of the circumstances, would expect to undermine, victimize, or threaten the employee(s), and that potentially pose a risk to the target's health and safety.

Workplace bullying is often used interchangeably with other negative workplace behaviors that may or may not fall under the broad definition of bullying, such as incivility, harassment, workplace violence, counterproductive behaviors, or abusive supervision.

Because of the various conceptualizations of bullying, it is imperative that organizations clearly define what it is, and what it is not in their policies.

Workplace bullying is complex, and often has multiple factors influencing the event. Mediators are advised to pay particular attention to the broader context because it can be a key factor in the development and maintenance of bullying. Jenkins (2011) argues that, "Most workplace bullying emerges from an escalation of workplace conflicts, where one person is more powerful than the other by virtue of his or her hierarchical position in the organization, knowledge, status, personality, or other personal attributes" (p. 28). In addition to power dynamics, Figure 1 illustrates a number of other factors that contributes to workplace bullying. Without taking these factors into account, mediation on its own may be futile in sustaining a long-term resolution.

Figure 1. Factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of workplace bullying
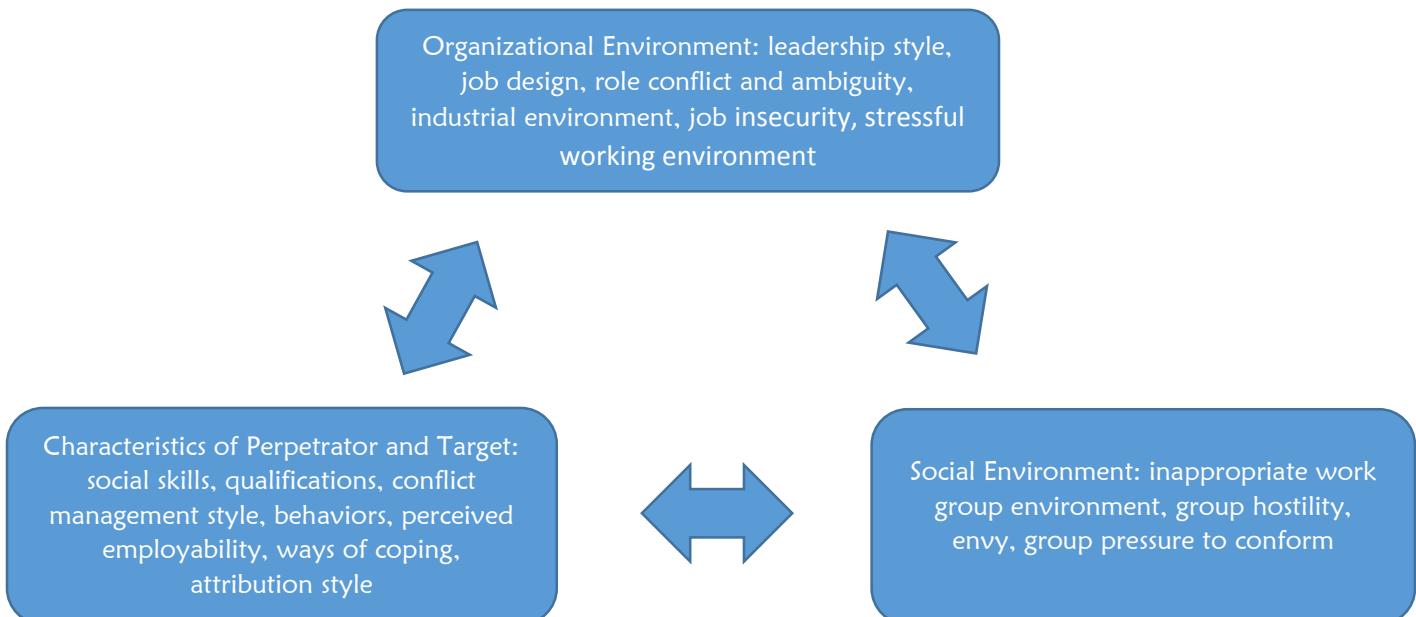
Jenkins (2011) concludes by explaining that, "There is no definite answer to the question of whether mediation is appropriate for bullying complaints" (p. 33). The literature points to mediation as a viable option if the mediation can surface and address the factors listed in Figure 1. Moreover, it is critical that mediators are aware of the difference between bullying and other workplace conflicts. The various definitions that exist and multiple ways that people explain their experiences may or may not be workplace bullying.

Below is a checklist that can be used as a guide by organizations to identify some of the systemic issues that may contribute to a complaint of bullying.

1) Does the organization have a bullying policy with a clear definition of bullying, and multiple options to resolve both conflicts and complaints of bullying?
2) Are bullying and harassment policies up to date, and are all employees and managers aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to inappropriate workplace behaviors?
3) Is there regular training of both managers and staff in relation to the policy and their rights and responsibilities?
4) Has the organization carried out an assessment of all staff to ascertain whether bullying may be a problem in some departments?
5) Are high levels of sick leave and absenteeism a problem in some departments?
6) Are there staff shortages that are contributing to high stress environments?
7) Has there been any recent change in the way work is carried out (new technology, processes, or equipment)?
8) Do staff in these areas feel they have had adequate training?
9) Are high levels of work stress and conflict a problem in some departments?
10) Are there workforce characteristics that could contribute to bullying or harassment within different teams in the organization, (such as younger or older workers, workers with a disability that may put them at risk of being picked on, or team members with a different sexual preference, gender, or ethnicity that may marginalize them from the larger group of workers)?
11) Are there systems in place to support the integration of new workers?
12) Do all managers and employees receive regular performance appraisals including feedback on management style and behavior?
13) Would employees in the department describe their manager as having good interpersonal skills?
14) Could organizational change be contributing to conflict, confusion, ambiguity, or uncertainty among staff?
15) Are negative leadership styles (autocratic or laissez-faire) contributing to high levels of conflict, poor interpersonal skills, role ambiguity, and mixed messages provided to staff?