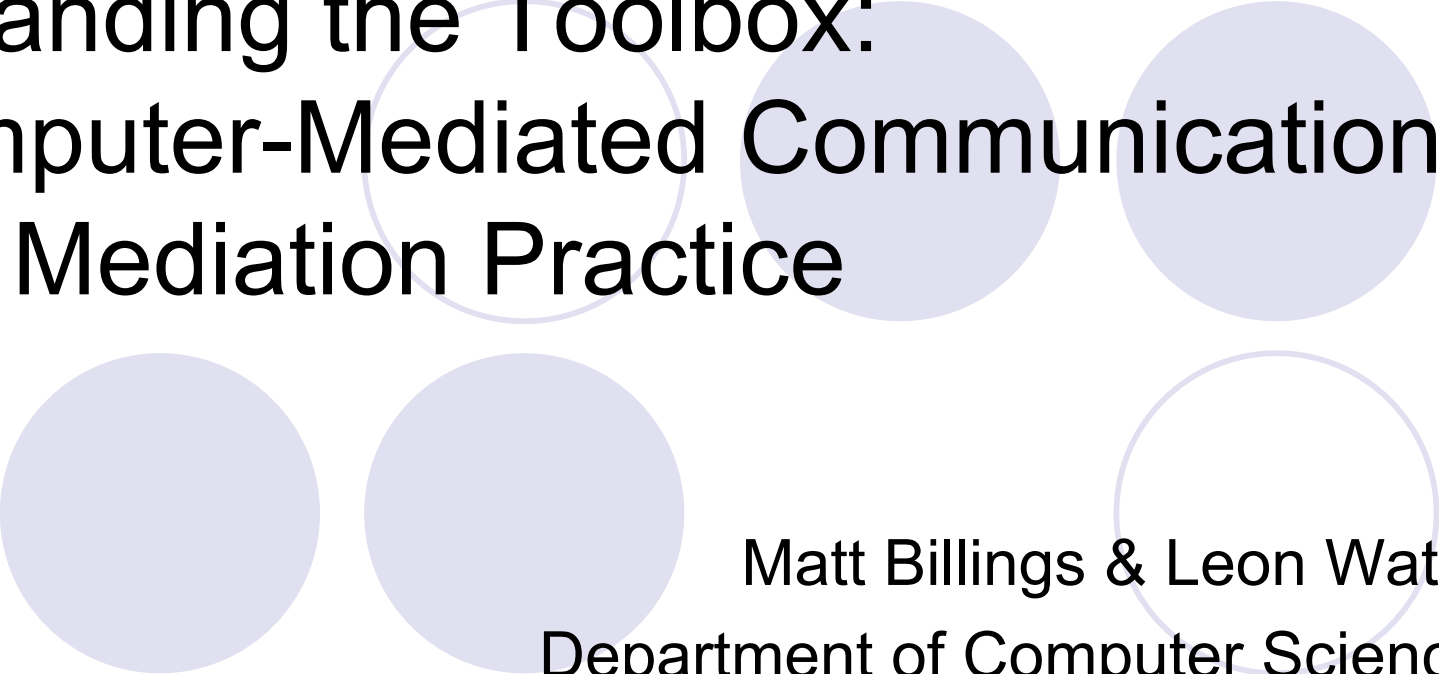


# Expanding the Toolbox: Computer-Mediated Communication and Mediation Practice



Matt Billings & Leon Watts  
Department of Computer Science  
The University of Bath  
BA2 7AY

# Overview



- Mediation (dispute resolution)
- Computer-Mediated Communication in relationships
- Mediator concerns about using CMC
- Mediation in Wikipedia
- Video mediation
- Guidelines for on-line mediation
- Conclusions



# Mediation (Dispute Resolution)

- *“Assistance to some form of interaction by a third-party who does not have the authority to impose an outcome”*  
(Wall & Standifer, 2001)
- Impartial, with no enforcing powers
- **Structures** communication
- **Reduces** ideological distance
- **Shapes** relationships

# Computer-Mediated Communication

- CMC is the use of computer technology to **reduce** distances
  - People separated in time
  - People separated in space
  - Technologies include: E-mail; chatroom; video-link; telephony
- CMC is associated with many effects:
  - Flaming (Mabry; 1997)
  - Reduced self disclosure (Joinson; 2001)
  - Selective self-presentation (Walther; 1996)
  - Low or fragile trust (Bos *et al*; 2002)
  - Increased intimacy (Turkle; 1995)

# Computer-Mediated Communication

- Relationships are ***shaped*** by CMC effects
  - Poverty of social information
  - Salience and context of social relationships
- Technological mediation imposes a structure on communication
  - Relationships can be transformed by structuring communication

# Researching CMC in Mediation Practice



- Question 1

- How might the relational impact of CMC shape the relational impact of mediation?

- Question 2

- How can CMC effects be used in mediation practice?

Question 1: How might the relational impact of CMC shape the relational impact of mediation?

# A Grounded Theory of Mediation

- Grounded Theory used to investigate the role of the mediator (Glaser & Strauss; 1967)
- Interviews with 12 practicing UK mediators and mediator trainers
  - Over 90 years' combined experience
  - Practicing in the majority of mediation domains
- Open-ended questions
  - Own view of mediator role/mediation process
  - Own perceptions of the effect of CMC on the above

Question 1: How might the relational impact of CMC shape the relational impact of mediation?

# Mediator Practice

- Control
  - Creating and maintaining a safe environment
- Listen
  - 'Venting': need to feel heard and acknowledged
- Reframe/ Rephrase
  - Techniques for encouraging ideological movement



Question 1: How might the relational impact of CMC shape the relational impact of mediation?

# Mediator Perceptions of CMC

- Mediators are reluctant to practice in an on-line environment
- Perceive CMC as:
  - Restricting the creation of 'presence'
  - Reducing the transmission of social cues
  - Distorting experience and/or power differentials
- Unpredictable effect adds uncertainty to mediator techniques for:
  - Control
    - Creating and maintaining a safe environment
  - Listen
    - 'Venting': need to feel heard and acknowledged
  - Reframe/ Rephrase
    - Techniques for encouraging ideological movement

# Investigating Technologically Mediated Dispute Resolution

- Mediation in a text-based environment (Wikipedia)
  - Discourse analysis of 5 mediations concerning disputed content
  - Interviews with 4 practitioners
- Mediation using Video-Mediated Communication (VMC)
  - Experienced mediator and actors in 2 role-plays, which varied in the intensity of conflict
  - Interview with practitioner

# Investigating Text-based Mediation

- Effects can be both positive and negative
- Reduced presence
  - *“People are much more likely to become entrenched when they are not actually there, but rather in their home/office just saying “no” to whatever solution the mediator proposes. You can’t get around that on Wikipedia.” (BrownHornet21)*
  - *“Much easier to do this online than when folks are screaming at you in person!” (NickY)*

# Wiki-media

- Rephrasing/reframing
  - “Because everything is permanent, the edit is still stored in the history”(FLCellogy)
  - Use of ‘strike-through’

## User:MattB2/presentation data1

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

< User:MattB2

Yes, the problem is that you never bother presenting other opinions. You only quote Suvorov and Sokolov (whose works, incidentally, are not recognized by most Western researchers) and don't provide an alternate opinion. This is a kind of anti-Zhukov crusade you're leading, and that's why I filed this medcab in the first place. -- **Grafikm**

(AutoGRAF) 11:21, 27 July 2006 (UTC)

Other opinions are already over-represented thanks to the decades of Zhukov's personality cult building by soviet propagandists. And I'm not quoting Suvorov in the article. Sigitas 11:52, 27 July 2006 (UTC)

"Other opinions are already over-represented thanks to the decades of Zhukov's personality cult building by soviet propagandists." To the mediator: do you see what I mean now? -- **Grafikm** (AutoGRAF) 12:09, 27 July 2006 (UTC)

These are all empty accusations. I do not quote Suvorov (although I don't see nothing wrong with him). I do not remove sourced alternative opinions. I provide only referenced facts. What is your problem? Can you please be more specific and say what in particular you don't like. Sigitas 12:28, 27 July 2006 (UTC)

I have two main problems with you. The first one is your conduct, with remarks bordering on personal attacks like "decades of Zhukov's personality cult building by soviet propagandists." and "Look you trolls, none of pages quoted says that Zhukov was good strategist, except of quote of Vasilevsky. Why you keep pushing this crap?" Such a conduct is to be avoided whenever possible.

The second problem is your unilateral representation of the events. You mention Sokolov and Suvorov (you don't quote Suvorov, it is true, however you mention him on the talk page to try and disprove my arguments) without even bothering to precise that it is only **one** point of view, that there exists another one, and you methodically revert any attempt to build a consensual version. And Suvorov is a highly controversial writer and his works are not recognized in the West.

Your attitude so far is to try and represent Zhukov as a complete idiot and a monster who only thought of sending troops into enemy fire. This violates WP:NPOV and Wikipedia is not a

soapbox. -- **Grafikm** (AutoGRAF) 14:21, 27 July 2006 (UTC)

It is not my fault that documents and facts show incompetence and sadistic nature of Zhukov. I do not invent anything. I'm not against consensus building. Quite contrarily, it is Zhukov's fans who are pushing controversial claims, like that "brilliant strategist" thing. There is no consensus on strategy skills of Zhukov, so why push it? Sigitas 14:30, 27 July 2006 (UTC)

Do not reduce the discussion to strategy skills. We argued on a number of other subjects, such as Leningrad defense, Kiev defense, and Zhukov's supposed order to kill families of captured soldiers, just to name a few. And the strategy skills thing is indeed the least controversial of them all. --

# Investigating Video-Mediation

- *“Not as different as I thought it would be”*
- ‘Equalise participation’
  - *“It was harder to achieve this ... it is harder to show an interest in the other party through the use of body-language & eye-contact. It has to be done verbally instead with shorter turns.”*
- Differing Control
  - More direct and closed questions



# Investigating Video Mediation

- “*Difficult to make things ‘visible’*”
  - Keep track of process
  - Described other’s behaviours
- Conflict was quicker to ‘*ramp-up*’ and to ‘*cool-down*’
  - Unsure about the success of ‘venting’
  - Narrows band in which intervention is effective



# Discussion 1: Relational Impact

- Does CMC provide a safe environment?
  - Venting
  - Repercussion
  - Commitment
- How does CMC affect shared understanding?
  - Misinterpretation and uncertainty
  - Visibility and accountability



# Discussion 2: Effects in Practice

- Techniques for constructively shaping relationships:
  - Naming actions and behaviours
  - Direct confirming questions
  - Consider magnified impact - smaller steps
- Recommendations for structuring mediation environments
  - Protected space
  - Making input 'translucent'





# Conclusions

- CMC can be used in mediation
- Can offer an alternative under certain circumstances
- Relational impact of CMC on mediator practice needs to be considered
- Incorporate CMC as an element of mediation (an extension to the mediator's toolbox)

Questions/Comments

?