



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
COURT ADMINISTRATION

The Court Administrator

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COURT ADMINISTRATION



“Global Perspectives on Court Administration”

17th International Conference

Dubai, UAE

16-19 November 2025

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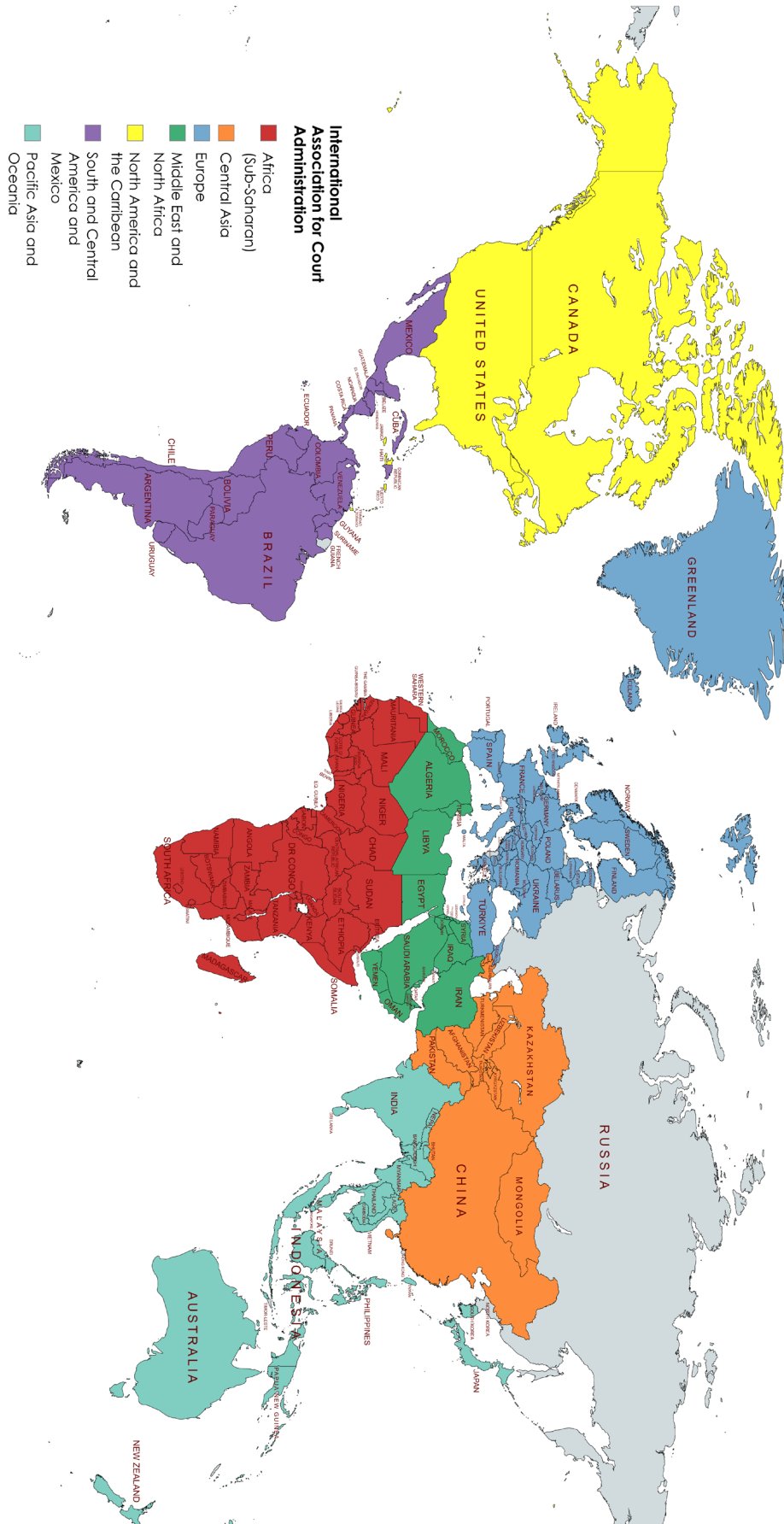
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Welcome IACA Colleagues & Friends!



Please take the time to visit and to share the IACA YouTube channel information at: https://www.youtube.com@IACA_World

Here, you can view the official Dubai conference photos, recordings, presentation slides and sponsor information. Take the opportunity to watch the video of Judge Gooshookhuu Davaadorj, Judge-Member of the Judicial General Council of Mongolia presenting the program, “The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Court Administration: The Mongolian Experience.” By tuning into our YouTube channel, you can watch recordings of previous IACA webinars, playlists, videos, the IACA membership movie and much more—all from your local device!

Participate. Share. Discuss. Contribute. Educate us and let us educate you. Become involved and embark upon the journey to play a vital role in IACA’s global mission.

As our individual worlds grow larger and more complex, IACA members become even closer. Our worlds and languages may initially sound and appear to be different, but, in reality, we are all speaking and supporting the same language—goals of trust and transparency in global judicial communities. “Follow Us” and “Join Us” as we take the voyage together!

“IACA’s mission is to promote professional court administration and management in emerging democracies and other countries pursuing the rule of law; to sponsor international conferences, forums and education and training programs on court administration and management; and to serve as a resource for judges, court administrators and managers, and other government officials in search of ways in which to evaluate and improve court and justice systems.”

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We wish to sincerely thank the Dubai Courts and the DIFC court hosts of the 2025 IACA conference for their hospitality, strengths, and their history making global events during this conference.

They have shared and educated us with innovations and brought to life, the past/present and future of the Dubai courts. They opened the doors to their courthouses for attendees to enter, observe and learn. They have given the IACA attendees so much information, technological ideas, understanding and knowledge to bring back to their own worlds that if we each had (theoretically) brought an empty suitcase to this conference to bring back our memories and impressions, they would be jam-packed!

We cannot thank the judges, administrators, support staff, and volunteers of the Dubai courts and the DIFC court enough for all of their hard work. Thank you from our collective hearts.



We wish to thank all of our Dubai conference sponsors for their support, loyalty and attendance at the 2025 IACA Dubai conference! Together, you have helped educate conference attendees regarding the specialized products currently available. They provide the tools to assist Judges, court administrators, court staff, lawyers, litigants, as well as court visitors and each person who has a vested interest in judicial systems around the world.

Our sponsors brought the technology to this conference to share with you, to inform you and to demonstrate available products that could be modified to fit individual global court systems.

View their websites to learn more and contact them personally for additional information.

We are grateful to all of our conference sponsors for their collaboration, support, and loyalty to IACA.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Global Perspectives on Court Administration



Pamela Harris, IACA President

DUBAI 2025. For over 330 judicial officers, court administrators, presenters, sponsors, and guests who gathered in November at the International Association for Court Administration (IACA) Annual Conference, those two words conjure something remarkable — a conference encompassing collective inspiration, professional renewal, and global connection that few of us will soon forget. Hosted by the Dubai Courts and the DIFC Courts at the Conrad Hotel, our conference on **“Global Perspectives on Court Administration”** exceeded every expectation, and this edition of *The Court Administrator* reflects the extraordinary depth of learning and exchange that took place.

From the moment delegates arrived, it was clear this was no ordinary gathering. As one attendee from the technology sector captured it so well in their conference blog: it felt less like a conference and more like a global roundtable. Conversations were thoughtful and substantive. People walked away with WhatsApp numbers instead of business cards. Delegates from over fifty countries representing common law, civil law, and hybrid legal systems, all sat together, shared openly, and left with far more than they came with. That, at its heart, is what IACA is for.

A Setting That Inspired

Dubai itself proved to be far more than a backdrop. It was a living demonstration of what courts can become when vision, leadership, and planning align. As His Excellency Justice Ali Al Madhani, Deputy Chief Justice of the DIFC Courts, reflected in his contribution to this publication, the conference created space for practical discussion rather than

abstract theory. The DIFC Courts, which was established in 2004 and now a mature common law institution serving an international commercial community, embodies a philosophy that courts must be understood not merely as places, but as services. Their judicial framework is precisely the kind of practical, purposeful reforms our membership is called upon to review, understand and undertake.

The Dubai Courts are widely recognized for their rapid modernization and commitment to judicial excellence in the United Arab Emirates. They have pioneered the use of smart technologies and digital platforms, enabling remote hearings, e-filing systems, and AI-assisted services that significantly enhance efficiency and access to justice. Dubai Courts have also implemented performance-driven case management systems to improve timeliness. Their efforts have positioned them as a global model for innovative, transparent, and user-centered court administration.

Strategic planning consultant Olga Comerzan, who presented at the conference, offered a vivid observation: at Dubai Courts headquarters, the first office a visitor encounters is labeled not “Customer Service” but “Customer Happiness.” That distinction—reactive management versus the initiative-taking generation of genuinely positive experiences—speaks volumes. Nothing in Dubai happens by chance. Everything serves a purpose. That lesson is transferable to every court system in the world, regardless of resources.

People-Centered Justice

If there was a single theme that wove through every session, every plenary, and every hallway conversation in Dubai, it was this: justice must be centered on the people it serves. This idea animated the work of every contributor to this issue.

Singapore’s Family Justice Courts, as presented by Registrar Kenneth Yap and District Judge Yarni Loi, have given concrete institutional form to this principle through their Therapeutic Justice Model. Launched in October 2024, the model reframes family court proceedings not as adversarial

continued

contests but as judge-led processes in which parties, lawyers, and professionals work together toward enduring resolutions with children's best interests at the center. The model's "One Family, One Team" approach, its triage processes, and its multi-disciplinary teams all reflect a profound commitment to addressing root causes, not just case outcomes. As their article concludes, a system is only as good as the people who implement it and those people must be willing to move beyond adversarial mindsets.

That same conviction was presented by Dr. Emad Hussein on Singapore's Court Dispute Resolution Cluster (CDRC) and the international Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (JDRN). Dr. Hussein reminded us that judge-led dispute resolution, when carefully embedded as institutional architecture rather than individual practice, can enhance efficiency, accessibility, and public confidence without undermining adjudicative integrity. The JDRN's 21 member judiciaries from sixteen countries are proof that the appetite for this kind of collaborative, adaptive justice is global.

His Excellency Judge Saeed Ali Naqib Abdulla of the Dubai Courts contributed a deeply thoughtful article on the examination of juvenile courts in China, a system that has transformed the administration of youth justice by insisting that young people be understood before they are judged. The Chinese model's emphasis on rehabilitation over punishment, on multidisciplinary assessment, on dialogue over confrontation, offers lessons that resonate far beyond China's borders. As His Excellency reminds us, a justice system capable of redirecting even one young life protects an entire society.

Professor Giuseppe Fazari of Monmouth University extended this human-centered lens into everyday court administration with his powerful framework of trauma-informed court management. Drawing on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study and the work of leading trauma researchers, Professor Fazari challenged all of us to recognize that behaviors we might interpret as defiance or indifference may instead be adaptive responses to past harm. The environments we create, the language we use, the training we invest in, all of it shapes whether a person who enters our courthouse leaves feeling seen and respected, or in the alternative, further alienated. No one in the court is unimportant. Every interaction matters.

Transparency, Trust, and the Digital Frontier

Judicial transparency was another dominant theme at the conference. Dr. Olga Tešović, co-presenting a plenary session alongside IACA President-Elect Dr. Tim Bunjevac, offered a rigorous three-dimensional framework for understanding transparency, not merely as information disclosure, but as institutional openness, procedural clarity, and public perception. Her core message bears repeating in that transparency is not a checklist. It is a continuous institutional culture. When courts invite the public into the justice conversation through accessible procedures, accountable governance, and respectful dialogue, they reinforce both legitimacy and democratic values.

Technology also was featured prominently throughout the conference, as it must. Yet the conference also reminded us, clearly and consistently, that technology is not a destination. It is an enabler. Courts are not private-sector platforms. Their legitimacy depends on trust, and trust depends on judgment, fairness, and human connection that no algorithm can supply. Innovation must strengthen trust, not substitute for it.

Strategic Planning: From Declaration to Daily Practice

Olga Comerzan's article on strategic planning distills some of the most practically useful thinking to emerge from the conference. Comparing Moldova's experience of planning under conditions of severe resource constraint and institutional fragility with Dubai's experience of planning amid rapid, resource-rich transformation, she demonstrates something profound: the methodology of effective strategic planning is remarkably consistent across wildly different contexts. What varies is the content, the specific goals, the realistic assessment of capacity, the priorities that make sense given where a court actually is. The question is no longer whether courts should plan strategically. That debate is settled. The question is whether those plans become living instruments of transformation or beautiful documents that nobody reads.

Her prism-and-lens metaphor is one I encourage every court leader to reflect upon. Dispersed light produces a beautiful rainbow, but unfortunately only temporary and dependent on external conditions. Focused light starts a fire. Strategic planning is the lens. It is what transforms fragmented institutional effort into coherent, purposeful progress.

The World Came to Dubai—and Left Transformed

The delegation from Papua New Guinea arrived in Dubai with a reform roadmap already underway with the nationwide rollout of their Integrated Electronic Case Management System, workforce modernization, and new court facilities. They too left with renewed resolve and expanded networks. Their Registrar, Ian Augerea, captured the spirit of IACA perfectly stating the institutions who seek real progress must embrace openness and collaboration. Judges and court administrators must work side by side. That is not a slogan. It is an approach that most thriving organizations embrace to be successful.

Across every article in this issue, a common truth emerges that no jurisdiction has solved every challenge, and every jurisdiction has something to teach. The court administrator in Singapore and the court administrator in Moldova are grappling, in their quite diverse ways, with the same fundamental questions: How do we earn and keep public trust? How do we serve the people who depend on us with fairness, dignity, and efficiency? How do we adapt to a world that is changing faster than our institutions were designed to move?

IACA exists to hold those questions together by creating spaces where court leaders from over fifty countries can sit down, speak honestly, and learn from one another. As our editor Eileen Levine so aptly observed, the value of attending

an IACA conference is unlike most things in life as it grows the moment you leave the room. Unlike a new car that depreciates the minute it drives off the lot, what you gain from this community, the ideas, the relationships, the renewed sense of purpose will be appreciated over time, sometimes a lifetime.

Looking Ahead

The future of court administration belongs to institutions that are clear in purpose, open to learning, and willing to adapt carefully. It belongs to courts that treat every person who walks through their doors - litigants, witnesses, jurors, or staff members with dignity and respect. It belongs to administrators who understand that their role is not merely to manage systems, but to help in co-designing justice itself.

This edition of *The Court Administrator* is a testament to the talent, commitment, and generosity of our global membership. My deepest gratitude is extended to all our authors, our delegations attending the conference, and **most importantly, His Excellencies Judge Ali Al Madhani, Dr. Saif Ghanim Al Suwaidi, Judge Omar Mohammad Meeran, and Judge Omar Al Mheiri** as well as to their entire team at the Dubai Courts and DIFC Courts for their exceptional hospitality.

Lastly, my gratitude also goes to our editor, Eileen Levine, whose dedication to this publication continues to be extraordinary.

Pamela Harris
President,

International Association for Court Administration

We are excited to introduce the International Association for Court Administration (IACA) updated logo together with a new tagline: Advancing the Administration of Justice Worldwide



This change reflects an important step in our continued evolution. While our core mission and commitment remain unchanged, the updated visual identity and messaging are intended to better represent who we are today and where we are headed. Over the coming weeks, you will begin to see the new logo and tagline across our communications, publications, and digital platforms. During this transition period, both the current and updated branding may appear as we complete the rollout.

We appreciate your continued support and engagement as we take this step forward. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Dubai, 2025. Our, my, chance of a lifetime to see, feel and to experience endless possibilities. Over three hundred thirty judicial officers, court administrators, presenters, sponsors and guests gathered together with (at the very least) one major goal in our collective minds. That is, how to navigate the rapidly changing world of court administration- fairly, justly, transparently and with dignity, for those coming in contact- for those citizens using and interacting-with the court and judicial systems in our individual respective worlds.

And, if any part of this amazing planet were to introduce our attendees to the worlds of the future, the IACA conference in Dubai, 2025, was certainly the place to be!

From learning about the past, present and the future developments of the Dubai and DIFC Courts at the conference venue, to visiting the Dubai courthouses and courtrooms, our attendees were met with awe and astounding inspiration and left with even more than they came with.

Our collective court worlds are moving at an astonishing pace, probably, unimagined by court officers just over twenty-five years ago. Except, of course, by those who had different technical, technological and visionary ideas and skill sets. Judicial officers and court administrators have the ability to use new IT tools, APPS and ideas currently available to further explore our commitments to those who we serve.

Today, answers to general life questions may be found with just a few keystrokes on a phone or device for most of the populace of the world in seconds. But, to those of us who interact daily with the public-either virtually or in person- we must make a lasting impression... and a good impression at that. To transmit judicial decisions while upholding the laws of our countries is a very difficult task. To administer, monitor and to keep our systems flowing clearly and succinctly is so much more than a written opinion or text in a procedural manual or website on how to finally get your "day in court." We recognize that some of our litigants will walk away



Eileen Levine

happy and some, possibly not so happy. Although we are certainly sympathetic to everyone's positions, unfortunately in many instances, there may only be one side that prevails. Dubai presenters reminded us of and enlightened attendees how mediations and negotiations help to make more people satisfied with their outcomes in court. People centered justice is becoming more pragmatic, prevalent and relevant.

We are all "actors" on our individual world stages- our courtrooms and courthouses. We must not be biased and must treat everyone fairly no matter

the circumstances that caused them to interject the court systems into their daily lives. They have come to us to use our knowledge and expertise to assist them to solve their personal problems, sometimes willingly, many times not. They may have had a brush with the laws of our states, and it is up to us to consider all sides in these legal matters. Our job is also extended to other stakeholders in court cases, the jurors and witnesses. As court administrators, we must also treat them with the utmost respect and impressiveness and consider what they are going through on many levels. For they too, may be in our courthouses in different capacities at later times and they will definitely remember and take away how they were treated.

With our ability to interact and to speak with court administrators from over fifty countries at the same time came an opportunity to grow and develop our individual court worlds. Some courts are just beginning technological and procedural stages, and some are more advanced, but they/ we all have commonalities. Conversing with and learning from others opens a time-launched dialogue, an opportunity to explore the available possibilities. IACA conferences provide the pilots to steer you in the right direction. We provide the venues and it is up to the attendees to follow our GPS road maps to help you find the way as we travel on our court administration journeys.

As the value of a vehicle may monetarily decrease the

minute you drive it out of the showroom, the opposite is true when attending an IACA conference. If our experiences in Dubai taught us anything, as it certainly taught me personally, our value to our colleagues, family members and of course, those we interact with during our daily work lives have fundamentally increased after attendance at an IACA conference. We each benefitted from the Dubai conference in different but significant ways. Our takeaways are what keep us going and coming back for more. Learning the importance of personal interactions is something that a machine or technology or a virtual machine can never replace. The importance of transparency, understanding and commitment, combined with our conference theme of “Global Perspectives On Court Administration” takes us to make significant assessments. That is- exchanging ideas, opening minds and communication will greatly improve the administration of justice and ultimately, our citizens’ lives.

To visit the world of the future and to learn to see many new inspiring conceptions, makes one appreciate what we have, where we are going and interpreting how the past provides understanding towards building the future of court administration.

In closing, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of the authors and contributors to this edition; His Excellency Justice Ali Al Madhani, His Excellency Judge Saeed Ali Naqib Abdulla, the entire delegation from Papua New Guinea, Mr. Kenneth Yap, District Judge Yarni Loi, Dr. Olga Tešović, Olga Comerzan, Dr. Emad Hussein, Judge Amel Arfaoui, Judge Marcelo López Alfonsín, Brian McGlynn, Rachel Klagsbrun, Eliran Noy, and Giuseppe M. Fazari as well as our sponsors, attendees and especially, IACA President, Pamela Harris.

Our authors and contributors take this publication to new heights. I am humbled by your submissions, your time, your patience and all of your hard work. Be safe and stay well.





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Meet Your IACA Regional Vice Presidents

Regional Boards are made up of a Vice President and between 5-8 board members. Vice President and/or Board Member positions are available in Africa, Central Asia, Europe, Middle East and Northern Africa, South and Central America, Pacific Asia and Oceania, and International Associations.

IACA invites you to participate. Please take this wonderful opportunity to consider joining your regional board. You can contact the Vice President of your region as listed on the Leadership page in The Court Administrator or on the IACA website under the "About Us" heading, drop down

Organizational Chart. If you are unsure of your region, please see the IACA Map in this edition or on the IACA website.

In our last edition #18, we introduced Kenneth Isaac Komicho, Regional Vice President for Africa and Victor Yeo, Regional Vice President for Pacific Asia and Oceania to our members.

In Part II of our series, we are honored to introduce Regional Vice Presidents the Honorable Marcelo Lopez Alfonsin, Regional Vice President for South and Central America and Judge Amel Arfaoui, Regional Vice President for the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Hon. Judge Amel Arfaoui

Amel Arfaoui is a judge at the Court of Appeal of the Administrative Court of Tunisia. Prior to her judicial appointment, she practiced law at an international law firm.

She is a senior advisor with nearly 15 years of experience in leading programmatic interventions, providing strategic counsel, and setting policy and programming priorities to advance the rule of law, peacebuilding, and gender equality across North Africa, including Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco.

Judge Amel Arfaoui has served in advisory roles with leading international Non-governmental Organizations, (NGOs) such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the American Bar Association (ABA). She also works with institutions of the European Union and United Nations agencies, including the United Nations' lead agency on international development (UNDP) and the International Organization for Migration, (IOM) the leading organization within the United Nations system promoting human rights and orderly migration for the benefit of all.

She currently serves as the Regional Vice President for the



Middle East and Northern Africa at the International

Association for Court Administration (IACA), contributing to regional efforts aimed at strengthening judicial systems and promoting best practices in court administration.

In recognition of her impactful contributions to the legal and development sectors, Amel was named a "Woman to Watch in Law" by the Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL) as part of their Amandla series.

Judge Arfaoui holds two Master's degrees from the University of Carthage – Faculty of Legal, Political, and Social Sciences of Tunis: one in

Legal, Political, and Social Sciences, and another in Public Administration and Financial Law. She also earned a Certificate in Project Management from the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia.

Judge Arfaoui is Tunisian and may be contacted at amel.arfaoui.shili@gmail.com.

continued

Hon. Marcelo López Alfonsín

Marcelo López Alfonsín is the Vice President of the Court of Appeals in Contentious Administrative, Tax and Consumer Relations of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Judge Marcelo López Alfonsín is a lawyer with a PhD in Law (Orientation in Constitutional Law) and a Master's in Human Environment.

He is also professor of "Elements of Constitutional Law", "Natural Resources Law and Environmental Protection", and "Human Rights and Guarantees" at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), and "Constitutional Law" at the University of Palermo (UP). He also is a professor of Graduate Careers on Constitutional Law,



Natural Resources Law, Environmental Law, the Master's in Magistracy of UBA, the Doctorate Careers of UBA, and John F. Kennedy University, and the Judicial Training Center of the Superior Court of Justice of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

Judge Marcelo López Alfonsín is a member of the World Commission on Protected Areas of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and serves as Honorary Secretary of the Institute of Environmental Policy of the Academy National Institute of Moral and Political Sciences in Argentina. Judge Alfonsín was designated as a member of the Jury for the Prosecution and Removal of Magistrates Office of the city of Buenos Aires.



Hosting the Global Court Administration Community in Dubai Reflections from the DIFC Courts on the IACA Conference 2025

By: His Excellency Justice Ali Al Madhani, Deputy Chief Justice of the DIFC Courts



The DIFC Courts are an independent common law judiciary based in the Dubai International Financial Centre, (DIFC) delivering English-language judicial services to businesses and individuals in Dubai, the region, and internationally.

If readers have questions or wish to follow up please see the court website at www.difccourts.ae or email marketing.communications@difccourts.ae.

Hosting the International Association for Court Administration (IACA) Conference in Dubai in 2025 was a significant moment for the DIFC Courts. It gave us the opportunity not only to welcome court leaders, judges, and administrators from around the world, but also to reflect on the practical realities of running a modern court in an increasingly complex and interconnected environment.

For us, the value of the conference was not simply in being associated with an international gathering of this calibre. Its real importance lay in the exchange of experience. Courts may operate within very different legal systems, constitutional structures and public expectations, but many of the core administrative challenges are now widely shared.

Across jurisdictions, courts are being asked to respond more quickly, improve accessibility, adopt technology responsibly and meet rising expectations from court users, all while preserving fairness, independence, and public confidence.

That is what made the conference especially worthwhile. It created space for practical discussion rather than abstract theory. The most valuable conversations were often the most grounded ones: how to improve the experience of court users, how to manage institutional change sensibly, how to support

judges with effective systems, and how to remain responsive without losing sight of the court's central purpose.

These are questions that resonate strongly with the DIFC Courts. Established in 2004, the DIFC Courts was created to provide Dubai with an English-language commercial common law court, designed to strengthen confidence in the legal framework supporting international business and trade. Over the past two decades, it has developed into a mature judicial institution serving both domestic and international users, with a growing body of case law and a clear focus on certainty, efficiency, and service.

As a court serving an outward-looking, fast-moving commercial centre, we are constantly conscious that legal robustness alone is not enough. Sound judgments and fair procedures remain essential, but the experience of the user also matters. Court users want systems that are clear, accessible, and proportionate. They want to know what their options are, what the process will involve, how long it is likely to take, and whether the route available to them makes sense for the issue they are facing. That expectation is not unreasonable; in many respects, it is now central to public trust in court administration.

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One of the strongest themes to emerge during the conference was the importance of designing court services around the needs of users. This is easy to describe in principle, but it has very real operational implications. User confidence is shaped not only by the final outcome of a case, but by the full journey: how intelligible the procedures are, how easy the system is to navigate, how quickly matters progress, and whether the process feels proportionate to the dispute at hand. A court may be legally rigorous, but if it is difficult to access or understand, that inevitably affects how it is experienced by those who rely on it.

This is an area in which the DIFC Courts has been placing increasing emphasis. Our long-standing philosophy has been that courts should be understood not simply as places, but as services: institutions that help people resolve problems fairly, efficiently and with confidence. That idea, often expressed as “*courts-as-a-service*”, is not just a slogan. It shapes the way we think about administration, process design and user engagement.

In practical terms, that has meant looking beyond a single model of dispute resolution. Not every matter requires the same pathway, and not every user is best served by an adversarial process. Some disputes require formal judicial determination. Others may be better suited to consensual resolution, streamlined claims procedures or administrative legal services that provide clarity without the need for litigation.

That is why recent service developments at the DIFC Courts are so important. **Law No. (2) of 2025**, issued on 10 March 2025, reaffirmed and modernised the judicial and administrative framework of the DIFC Courts. Among its most important features was the formal establishment of a **Mediation Service Centre**, alongside the continued strengthening of the broader service offering of the Courts. The law also replaced the earlier 2004 legislative framework, clarifying jurisdiction and reinforcing the independent operation of the institution.

The introduction of the Mediation Service Centre, together with the Notary Service, reflects a broader understanding of what court users need today. Many court users are not necessarily looking for a full trial. Often, they are seeking a faster, more practical, lower-cost route to resolve a dispute, record an agreement or complete an important legal step. By broadening the range of services available, the DIFC Courts

is better placed to meet users where they are, rather than requiring every issue to pass through the same procedural channel.

This is where the concept of the “**multi-door courthouse**” becomes especially relevant. It is a simple but powerful idea: rather than directing every problem through one door, a modern court should offer **multiple pathways**, each suited to different needs. At the DIFC Courts, that means users may access litigation, arbitration, mediation, small claims procedures, wills services and notary services through one institutional framework. The objective is not to dilute the role of the court, but to make it more useful — to ensure that individuals, SMEs and multinational businesses alike can find the route that best fits their circumstances.

That message was particularly relevant at IACA. Across many of the discussions, there was a clear recognition that court effectiveness can no longer be measured solely by case throughput or hearing schedules. Those metrics remain important, but they are no longer sufficient on their own. Increasingly, effective court administration is about creating an overall service environment: one that offers clarity, flexibility and choice, while still preserving legal certainty and procedural discipline.

Another major theme throughout the conference was innovation. That is unsurprising. Almost every court system is now grappling with how best to modernise. Digital filing systems, online hearings, better case management tools, remote access, data-driven administration and the careful use of emerging technologies all have an obvious role to play in improving convenience and efficiency. Yet in a judicial setting, innovation must always be approached with care.

Courts are not private-sector platforms, and they cannot change simply for the sake of appearing modern. Their legitimacy depends on trust. Any reform must therefore strengthen that trust, not weaken it. New systems must be secure, fair, reliable and properly understood by those who use them. Technology can and should improve court administration, but it is not a substitute for sound judgment, good governance or thoughtful institutional design.

This was one of the most useful features of the conference. The conversations were not merely promotional discussions about new tools. They were more mature than that. They focused on implementation, safeguards and practical judgment. The real question is not whether a process can be

digitised, but whether it should be, how it should be done, and what protections need to be built around it.

That is very much the approach taken by the DIFC Courts. Innovation has been central to the institution since its early years, from digital systems and remote access to specialist divisions and future-facing legal initiatives. But technology, in our experience, is only useful when it improves the underlying service. The most successful reforms are not always the most dramatic. Often, they are the ones that quietly remove friction, make procedures easier to understand, and allow court users to engage with the system in a more straightforward and proportionate way.

Hosting the conference was also, in itself, a reminder that administration is often most visible when it works well. From the delegate's perspective, a conference is defined by its programme, speakers and atmosphere. Behind the scenes, however, success depends on the same qualities that underpin a well-run court: planning, coordination, communication, logistics, responsiveness and attention to detail. In that sense, hosting IACA was not separate from the work of court administration; it was an expression of it.

For the DIFC Courts - and for our co-hosts at Dubai Courts - that meant close cooperation across teams and a shared understanding of what the conference needed to achieve. It required communications, operations, protocol and leadership functions to work in step. It also required a consistent sense of purpose: that the event should be useful, welcoming and professionally delivered, while reflecting Dubai's wider role as a place of international exchange and institutional ambition.

One of the most rewarding features of the conference was its genuinely international character. Participants came from a wide range of jurisdictions, each bringing different systems, assumptions, and constraints. No two courts are identical, and no jurisdiction has solved every challenge. Yet there is enormous value in comparative discussion. Hearing how others have approached familiar problems can sharpen institutional thinking, test assumptions and offer practical insight that may not emerge in purely domestic conversations.

For the DIFC Courts, that comparative element matters. While we are based in Dubai and form part of the UAE's legal framework, we serve an international community of users and operate within a commercial environment that is deeply cross-border. Comparative learning is therefore not an academic exercise for us. It is part of how we continue to refine the institution, improve service delivery and ensure that our processes remain aligned with international best practice.

The timing of the conference also gave it particular relevance. It took place during a period of continued institutional development for the DIFC Courts, including the implementation of a new legal framework, the broadening of services and the wider articulation of long-term strategic priorities. That made the event more than an opportunity to host others; it became a valuable moment of reflection for ourselves as well.

Looking back, perhaps the clearest conclusion is that the future of court administration will belong to institutions that are clear in purpose, open to learning and willing to adapt carefully. Trust remains the foundation of any court system. Without it, efficiency and innovation will never be enough. But trust alone is not sufficient either. Courts must also be practical, understandable and responsive to the needs of the people and businesses they serve.

For the DIFC Courts, it was a privilege to help host the IACA Conference in Dubai and to contribute to those discussions. We were proud to welcome the international court administration community, to share aspects of our own experience, and to learn from the experience of others. The conference was a timely reminder that while courts are defined by legal authority, they are sustained by good administration — by people, systems, preparation and the steady discipline of making institutions work well.

It was an honour for the DIFC Courts to be part of that shared effort as host in 2025, and we came away with a renewed appreciation for the value of practical exchange, thoughtful reform and international collaboration in the service of better court administration.

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Juvenile Courts in China: When Judicial Reform Protects the Future

By-Line: His Excellency Judge Saeed Ali Naqib Abdulla, Appellate Judge, Dubai Courts



In addition to responsibilities serving as a judicial officer adjudicating labor disputes at the appellate level, His Excellency Judge Saeed Ali Naqib Abdulla, participates in international judicial conferences and professional forums relating to court administration. His Excellency promotes the development of judicial systems, as well as actively contributing to judicial development initiatives. Prior to his judicial appointment, His Excellency Judge Saeed Ali Naqib Abdulla served as a Public Prosecutor and a Police Officer.

Abstract

This article examines the development and institutional philosophy of Juvenile Courts in China as a model of reform-oriented justice. It highlights the transition from a punitive framework to a protective and rehabilitative judicial approach centered on early intervention, judicial mediation, and social reintegration. It further reflects on how specialized youth courts strengthen long-term societal stability by prioritizing correction over condemnation. Through a comparative perspective, the article emphasizes the growing global relevance of youth-focused judicial systems.

From within the judicial arena where cases are never merely numbers recorded in registers, and facts are not reduced to sterile procedural narratives a deep and enduring conviction gradually forms in the mind of a judge over years of service. Justice, in its truest and most meaningful sense, is not always found in the severity of punishment, nor in the harshness of sanction, nor even in the strict literal application of legal text. Rather, it reveals itself in justice's capacity to restore balance to a human being whose path has faltered, and to protect society by preventing error from repeating itself until it solidifies into a permanent pattern of deviation.

This understanding does not arise from theory alone, nor from academic abstraction. It is shaped slowly, case by case, by observing outcomes by witnessing how certain judgments

close doors forever, while others, wisely calibrated, manage to correct direction without extinguishing potential. Nowhere does this truth become more evident than when the individual standing before the bench is a young person, still forming their identity, still navigating the fragile boundaries between experimentation and wrongdoing, still learning often painfully the meaning of responsibility and consequence.

Youth, by its very nature, exists within a sensitive and transitional space. Psychological impulses are heightened, social pressures exert strong influence, and emotional responses often precede rational judgment. Experience is limited, perspective incomplete, and the capacity to foresee long-term consequences remains underdeveloped. This combination renders young people uniquely vulnerable: highly receptive to guidance and correction when approached wisely, yet equally susceptible to deeper deviation when treated with excessive rigidity or exclusion.

For these reasons, traditional justice systems designed primarily around adult reasoning, mature agency, and fully developed accountability have increasingly proven insufficient when applied wholesale to young offenders. A rigid, uniform application of adult-oriented justice risks misreading not only the act itself, but the human being behind it. It risks transforming temporary misjudgment into permanent marginalization.

continued

It was from this recognition that juvenile courts emerged: not as an exception to justice, but as a more accurate expression of it. These courts do not see young people merely as potential offenders to be deterred, but as human potential in the process of formation individuals who must first be understood before they are judged and guided before they are excluded.

Within this evolving global understanding, the experience of the People's Republic of China stands out as one of the most substantive and instructive models. China succeeded in transforming juvenile courts from a marginal judicial specialization into a central pillar of its justice system anchored in a clear philosophy, guided by long-term societal objectives, and producing measurable impact on both individuals and the broader social fabric.

A Different Justice for a Different Group

Juvenile courts are not built on leniency for their own sake, nor on indulgence justified solely by the factor of young age. Such a simplistic understanding would undermine both justice and accountability. Instead, these courts are grounded in a scientific, psychological, and human appreciation of developmental reality. When unlawful behavior is committed by a young person, it is rarely the product of deeply rooted criminal intent. More often, it is a reflection of surrounding circumstances that have shaped behavior rather than a conscious commitment to wrongdoing.

Family instability, educational disruption, peer influence, social pressure, economic stress, lack of guidance, and the absence of credible role models all play significant roles in shaping youth behavior. Ignoring these factors does not strengthen justice; it weakens it. A legal response that fails to acknowledge context risks addressing symptoms while leaving causes untouched.

Accordingly, a justice system that employs identical tools for adults and young people fails not only in proportionality, but in comprehension. It misreads the individual before misjudging the act. Juvenile courts were created to bridge this critical gap—to transform justice from a mechanical process of accusation and sentencing into a comprehensive exercise in understanding, accountability, and correction.

In this framework, responsibility is not erased. Rather, it is redefined in a manner appropriate to the individual's stage of development. The goal is not to excuse wrongdoing, but to ensure that accountability becomes a mechanism for growth rather than a sentence of exclusion.

The Philosophy Behind Juvenile Courts

At the heart of the juvenile court model lies a philosophy both simple and profound: society gains nothing by converting a young person's mistake into a final verdict on their future. Youth represent the stage of greatest malleability, the period in which intervention can still redirect trajectories and reshape outcomes.

Juvenile courts operate on principles that are not always formally codified yet are deeply embedded in judicial practice. Chief among these principles is belief in the capacity for rehabilitation. This belief is neither naïve nor sentimental; it is grounded in empirical observation and long-term societal interest. Closely linked is the principle of individualized justice, the understanding that fairness does not lie in uniformity, but in contextualized judgment.

Another central principle is the consideration of the young person's best interests, not as an abstract moral slogan, but as a concrete judicial responsibility balanced carefully against public safety and the rights of victims. Judicial decisions in this context are conceived not merely as responses to past conduct, but as preventive measures aimed at shaping future behavior.

This philosophy does not deny responsibility. On the contrary, it treats responsibility seriously—so seriously that it refuses to waste it by imposing sanctions that harden alienation rather than cultivate accountability. It rejects the notion that justice must choose between firmness and humanity, insisting instead that true justice demands both.

The Chinese Experience: From Reality to Model

Juvenile courts in China did not emerge as imported theoretical constructs or external legal fashions. They developed organically in response to profound social and economic transformations experienced over recent decades. Rapid urbanization, internal migration, changing family structures, technological expansion, and shifting cultural norms reshaped the social environment in which young people matured.

These transformations produced new pressures, new vulnerabilities, and new forms of youth behavior, many of which could not be effectively addressed through traditional punitive frameworks alone. Recognizing this reality, Chinese judicial authorities acknowledged that punishment, when applied in isolation, often fails to resolve underlying issues and may even exacerbate them.

The institutional response was deliberate and structured. Under the guidance of the Supreme People's Court, a comprehensive framework for juvenile justice was developed, one that embedded juvenile courts within the mainstream judicial system rather than treating them as peripheral or exceptional entities. Clear objectives were defined, emphasizing rehabilitation, prevention, and reintegration alongside accountability.

This integration ensured both legitimacy and consistency, while allowing sufficient flexibility to adapt judicial tools to the specific needs of young people. The result was a system capable of evolving alongside social change rather than reacting belatedly to its consequences.

The Judge in a Juvenile Court: A Role Beyond Adjudication

Within juvenile courts, the role of the judge undergoes a fundamental transformation. The judge is no longer merely an adjudicator resolving a dispute between opposing parties. Instead, the judge becomes a central figure in a broader rehabilitative process, one that requires insight, empathy, and discernment alongside legal expertise.

Accordingly, judges assigned to juvenile courts in China are selected based on criteria extending well beyond technical legal competence. They are chosen for their capacity to understand psychological dynamics, manage constructive dialogue, de-escalate tension, and interpret the social backgrounds that inform behavior.

Supporting the judge is a multidisciplinary team comprising psychologists, social workers, and educational specialists. These professionals contribute detailed assessments that illuminate the young person's family environment, educational history, emotional state, and social interactions. Far from being supplementary, these assessments form an integral part of the judicial file, shaping decisions with depth and nuance.

Through this collaborative structure, judicial decisions emerge not as isolated legal reactions, but as informed outcomes of comprehensive human evaluation.

A Court That Listens Before It Judges

In juvenile courts, justice begins well before the formal hearing. Extensive preparatory work is undertaken to understand the young person's circumstances in their entirety.

Family dynamics, school performance, mental health, peer relationships, and prior interventions are all examined carefully.

Court sessions themselves are conducted in environments deliberately designed to reduce intimidation and alienation. Language is simplified without diminishing authority, and proceedings emphasize dialogue over confrontation. Young people are encouraged to speak, to explain, and to reflect. Parents or guardians are actively involved, reinforcing the concept of shared responsibility.

In many cases, the hearing becomes a pivotal moment of realization in a space where the young person confronts the real consequences of their actions within a framework that preserves dignity while affirming accountability.

Judgments That Reform Rather Than Exclude

Whenever possible, juvenile courts in China avoid custodial sentences, fully aware of the profound and often irreversible harm incarceration can inflict at this stage of life. Instead, they employ a range of rehabilitative measures designed to impose responsibility while preserving future opportunity.

These measures include psychological counseling, educational and vocational programs, community service, structured family supervision, and monitored behavioral commitments. Each measure is tailored to the individual, calibrated to address both behavior and its underlying causes.

Contrary to common misconceptions, such judgments do not weaken the authority of the law. They strengthen it by demonstrating that justice is capable of wisdom, restraint, and long-term vision.

An Impact Extending Beyond the Individual

The results of the Chinese juvenile court model have been tangible and significant. Rates of reoffending among young people have declined, reliance on imprisonment has decreased, and trust between youth and legal institutions has improved.

More importantly, the deeper impact manifests over time. Juvenile courts reduce pressure on penal systems, lower the economic cost of crime, and contribute to social stability. By redirecting young lives rather than discarding them, society invests in prevention rather than perpetually paying the price of neglect.

Justice as Partnership, Not a Solitary Decision

continued

Juvenile courts operate within an extensive network of partnerships involving families, schools, social welfare institutions, and youth-focused organizations. Judicial authority alone cannot correct complex social failures, but coordinated institutional action can.

This model recognizes that sustainable rehabilitation requires collective effort. The court serves as a focal point aligning legal authority with social responsibility.

An Inspiring Experience Despite the Challenges

Despite its achievements, the Chinese experience is not without challenges. Disparities in regional implementation, the need for continuous specialized training, public pressure in serious cases, and the delicate balance between firmness and flexibility all demand ongoing attention.

Yet these challenges affirm not undermine the vitality of the model. They demonstrate that juvenile justice is not static, but an evolving process responsive to societal change.

Conclusion

Juvenile courts represent one of the most mature and humane expressions of contemporary justice. They view the young person not as a case file, but as a human project still in formation, and see in error the beginning of correction rather than the end of the road.

The Chinese experience confirms that justice, when guided by wisdom, can protect society without destroying its individuals—and safeguard the future without abandoning accountability. A justice system capable of guiding even one young person back to the right path ultimately contributes to protecting an entire society from preventable harm.

Reflections on the 2025 IACA Conference Dubai from the Delegation from Papua New Guinea Judiciary

Submitted by emissaries from Papua New Guinea. Readers can contact the delegation by reaching out to Tony Kila, Acting Director for Change Management, PNG National Judiciary Services at tkila@pngjudiciary.gov.pg.

A delegation from the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Judiciary was honored to attend and participate in the 2025 Global Perspectives on Court Administration Conference, held in Dubai in November 2025. The conference was a landmark event gathering judicial leaders, court innovators and justice reform experts worldwide.

Led by Ian Augerea, Registrar of the Supreme Court and National Courts, the PNG delegation included Robert Tonny, Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS) Manager, Michael Pokakes, IT Infrastructure Manager and Tony Kila, Acting Director for Change Management, National Judiciary Services. The team highlighted PNG's commitment to modernizing court operations, strengthening institutional capacity and improving access to justice.

“Global Perspectives on Court Administration”

The conference explored key trends in justice reform and provided a platform for PNG to showcase its ongoing initiatives, including the nationwide rollout of the Integrated Electronic Case Management System.

Key Takeaways Aligned with PNG Judiciary Reform Priorities

Digital Transformation & AI in Justice: Sessions emphasized artificial intelligence applications in case triage, scheduling, document analysis, and automated services. These innovations can significantly improve efficiency, transparency and access to justice, complementing PNG's ongoing digital reforms.

Education and Workforce Development: This program explored the importance of structured professional pathways and judicial capacity building resonated with PNG's efforts to enhance digital literacy and workforce competencies across the courts.

Optimizing Reform Implementation: provided global case studies highlighting best practices in sequencing reforms to achieve measurable outcomes. PNG's reform journey includes IECMS deployment, restructuring judicial and administrative functions, transitioning into new court facilities and phasing out legacy systems.

Court Administration and Access to Justice: In this presentation, discussions focused on workflow optimization, infrastructure modernization, and user centered service design key priorities for improving PNG courts' efficiency and public service delivery.

Comparative Court Models: provided exploration of specialized administrative courts, tribunal systems and hybrid models provided useful insights for PNG in refining institutional arrangements for better justice delivery.

People Centered Justice:

A recurring theme was prioritizing community needs, transparency, and user experience in court services, aligning closely with PNG's focus on accessibility, inclusiveness and public trust.

Strengthening PNG's Reform Roadmap

IACA President Pamela Harris opened the conference with a clear message: institutions that seek real progress must embrace openness and collaboration. For the judiciary, this requires judges and court administrators working side-by-side to translate shared visions into practical solutions, particularly in the areas of judicial administration and automation. Echoing this sentiment, the IACA President underscored the value of consortium-based systems that can deliver both regional and institutional priorities. With technology and AI rapidly shaping the justice landscape, the call was for courts to actively leverage these tools to achieve meaningful and lasting improvements.

continued

Registrar Ian Augerea highlighted the need for stronger engagement with national and international partners to ensure reforms are sustainable. He emphasized the importance of establishing an independent program to coordinate reform initiatives, support strategic decision-making and drive evidence-based improvements across the justice sector.

The PNG delegation's participation demonstrated the country's growing presence within global justice innovation networks benchmarking progress, exchanging insights on digital transformation and ensuring alignment with international best practices. Lessons from the conference

will directly inform ongoing national initiatives such as the IECMS IDM8 rollout, change management strategies, workforce modernization and the broader transformation of court operations.

The 2025 conference concluded with a reaffirmation of the PNG Judiciary's commitment to building a more efficient, transparent and accessible justice system, grounded in strategic planning, effective collaboration and strong, forward-thinking leadership.

We will be able to integrate and develop many of the ideas into PNG's court administration practices.



Left to right, Michael Pokakes, Tony Kila, Registrar – Ian Augerea, Jennifer Akers, Robert Tonny



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The Family Justice Courts Therapeutic Justice Model

By: Kenneth Yap, Registrar of the Family Justice Courts of Singapore and District Judge Yarni Loi, Principal Director of the Therapeutic Justice Transformation Office of the Family Justice Courts of Singapore



Registrar Kenneth Yap joined the Singapore Legal Service in 2001. Prior to Mr. Yap's appointment as Registrar, he was a District Judge in the Criminal Justice Division of the State Courts, a Senior Assistant Registrar of the Supreme Court and a Justices' Law Clerk in the Singapore Courts. Mr. Yap currently serves as a Member of the Appeal Board of the Commission of Foreign Manpower under the Ministry of Manpower and is appointed to the Board of Directors of the Singapore Mediation Centre.



District Judge Yarni Loi was appointed as a District Judge of the Family Justice Courts after her private practice career in corporate litigation. This role allows District Judge Loi to leverage both her legal and counselling expertise in service of Singapore's judicial system.

Registrar Kenneth Yap and District Judge Yarni Loi presented their program entitled "Family Justice Courts' Operational Model of Therapeutic Justice" during the Dubai conference.

Synopsis

In October 2024, the Family Justice Courts ("FJC") launched the FJC Therapeutic Justice ("TJ")¹ Model ("TJ Model") for matrimonial proceedings² setting out:

- a. The core values and language of TJ.
- b. The objectives of the TJ Model.

- c. The expected standards of conduct for litigants and counsel.
- d. The roles of parties and their lawyers in achieving TJ outcomes.

Since the mid-1990s, there has been sustained efforts to rethink how family justice should be delivered resulting, for example, in the strong emphasis on child focused mediation and counselling within the FJC.³ The TJ Model is both a capstone, as well as evolution, of these past efforts. Conceived

¹ The TJ Model is issued under "Registrar's Circular No. 2 of 2024 – Family Justice Courts Therapeutic Justice Model" and is also accessible online at the SG Courts website at www.judiciary.gov.sg.

² Para 90C(2) of the Family Justice Practice Directions 2024.

³ Yarni Loi and Suzanne Chin, "Therapeutic Justice – What It Means for the Family Justice System in Singapore" (2021) Family Court Review, 59(3), 425-434.

with Singapore’s unique socio-cultural context in mind, the TJ Model gives concrete form to TJ principles and will continue to evolve through feedback from stakeholders.⁴

This article will examine some key features of the TJ Model.

Key Features of the TJ Model

TJ @ FJC is defined as follows:⁵

“TJ at the FJC is about helping families accept the past and move towards their best possible future. It involves a judge-led process where parties and their lawyers, along with other professionals, work together to find timely and enduring solutions to the family’s disagreements, within the framework of the law.”

The TJ Model also sets out the following **TJ objectives**:⁶

- a. Encourage amicable resolution of disputes.
- b. Reduce acrimony and de-escalate conflict.
- c. Address root causes with a focus on the long-term welfare.
- d. Prioritise children’s best interests.
- e. Promote respectful and constructive interactions.
- f. Empower families to resolve future issues without litigation.

In terms of the **court process**, the TJ Model introduces a **triage process**. Parties are now required to submit a Joint Triage Checklist (“**JTC**”) shortly after the commencement of proceedings. The JTC provides the Court with a preliminary view of the case, including any additional considerations such as the existence of other linked applications filed by the same parties in FJC, allegations of family violence and the involvement of Child Protective Services, amongst others.

Thereafter, the **TJ Cooperative Conference (“TJCC”)** has been introduced as the first substantive court event that parties have to attend if the case involves minor children or if the case is a non-child case with high conflict case. At the TJCC, a mediation judge engages the parties to set expectations for conduct and cooperation at the outset, finds common ground and identifies outstanding issues before giving appropriate directions for the next steps. Parties are required to attend the TJCC together with their counsel, if they are represented. For

cases involving minor children under the age of 14, a Court Family Specialist (“**CFS**”) will be present at the TJCC and will follow up with the parties after the TJCC for their first intake and assessment and counselling session.

Mediation and counselling would typically be directed after the TJCC, to try and resolve as many issues as possible at an early stage and refer parties to appropriate therapeutic interventions, as appropriate.

Following the initial triage and mediation stage, cases may be allocated to one of the following tracks:

- a. **Standard Track:** Managed by Assistant Registrars (“**ARs**”) until the case is ready for the next court event, such as hearing or a trial when it will be fixed before a hearing judge.
- b. **Teams Track:** Managed by a multi-disciplinary team comprising the same mediation judge, CFS and hearing judge under the “One Family, One Team” approach. All cases with contested child issues and non-child cases which are high conflict will be filtered to the Teams Track. As of March 2025, all hearing and mediation judges at the FJC have been assigned to such multi-disciplinary teams.

The hallmark of the Teams Track is consistent yet flexible case management from an early stage until the final resolution of the case. This minimises the need for parties to repeat their narratives before different judges at different stages of the court proceedings, reduces unnecessary filings, and enables earlier referrals to therapeutic services. Early interventions help address root causes of conflict and support parties and children in healing and focusing on the future. Mediation, counselling, and other interventions are deployed by the same multi-disciplinary team on an as-needed basis, rather than at fixed stages.

The TJ Model also sets out the **roles of all court participants**, starting with the parties. **Parties** play the most important role under the TJ Model which makes it clear that they are ultimately expected to take ownership of their issues and actively collaborate to work towards sustainable resolutions.⁷

Their responsibilities include:⁸

continued

4 Justice Teh Hwee Hwee, “Building Hope, Embracing Change”, address at 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Family Justice Courts (21 October 2024) at para 11.

5 Para 2 of the TJ Model.

6 Para 5 of the TJ Model.

7 Para 9(a) of the TJ Model.

8 Para 90G(1) of the Family Justice Courts Practice Directions 2024; para 12 of the TJ Model.

- a. Cooperating with each other and the court.
- b. Participating meaningfully in the JTC, TJCC, mediation and counselling.
- c. Prioritising children’s welfare.
- d. Complying with court orders and therapeutic referrals.

The following table summarises the key “Do’s and Don’ts” expected of parties:⁹

Do’s	Don’ts
Prioritise children’s interests and family well-being.	Focus solely on “winning”.
Focus on future and shared interests.	Dwell on past grievances.
Adopt a cooperative, constructive mindset.	Be combative or adversarial.
Make genuine efforts at mediation.	Make extreme or unreasonable demands.
Use respectful, constructive language.	Use provocative or inflammatory language.

Do’s	Don’ts
File only necessary applications.	File irrelevant or vexatious applications.
Submit concise, relevant evidence.	Submit scandalous or excessive evidence.
Protect children from acrimony.	Involve children in proceedings.

Lawyers, who are often the first responders in family cases, play a critical role in supporting their clients in implementing the TJ Model. They are expected to:¹⁰

- a. Explain the TJ Model to clients, and prepare them for each procedural stage, including the JTC and TJCC.
- b. Discourage inflammatory or unnecessary filings.
- c. Work collaboratively with opposing counsel and the court.
- d. Make clear, concise submissions and help clients understand and comply with court decisions.

Lawyers who exemplify TJ values may be commended by the court. In addition, costs orders may reflect whether parties and counsel have conducted themselves in line with TJ principles. Disruptive or uncooperative conduct that are not aligned with TJ values may attract adverse costs consequences.¹¹

9 Para 13 of the TJ Model.

10 Para 9(b), 14 of the TJ Model; para 90G(2) of the Family Justice Practice Directions 2024.

11 Para 19 of the TJ Model; para 90H(4) of the Family Justice Practice Directions 2024.

12 Paras 9(c) and 10 of the TJ Model.

13 Sundaresh Menon CJ, address at the Opening of the Legal Year 2020 (6 January 2020) at para 14.

The TJ Model effectively relies on an ecosystem of professionals who work together to de-escalate conflict and promote healing. They include:¹²

- a. TJCC and mediation judges, who seek to find common ground between the parties and facilitate early resolution of outstanding issues.
- b. Hearing judges, who take a judge-led and robust approach in managing cases and adjudicating in a timely fashion if parties are not able to settle their cases.
- c. CFSs, who support parties through brief therapeutic interventions and referrals.
- d. Court Administrators/case managers, who coordinate case management.
- e. External professionals such as psychologists and social workers, who provide essential and crucial community-based support.

Conclusion

A system is only as good as the people who implement it. Judges, court professionals, and lawyers must therefore adapt to new roles that require them to move beyond traditional adversarial mindsets and embrace “a change of perspective”¹³ in resolving family disputes. This shift entails significant training, professional development, and attitudinal change.

The TJ Model’s promise lies in its potential to transform family justice into a more humane, efficient, and supportive system, one that not only resolves legal disputes but also fosters healing and growth across the varied and complex journeys of families. For more information on the TJ Model, please visit the SG Courts website at <https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/who-we-are/therapeutic-justice>.



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FROM CONCEPT TO PRACTICE: JUDICIAL TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC TRUST IN ACTION - REFLECTIONS FROM THE IACA ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN DUBAI

By Dr. Olga Tešović, Research Fellow and Senior Lecturer, Judicial Academy, Belgrade, Serbia



Dr. Olga Tešović is a legal professional and researcher specializing in criminal justice, judicial reform, and people-centered legal systems. She serves as a Lecturer at the Judicial Academy of Serbia and is a certified Research Fellow recognized by the Ministry of Science. A former criminal judge and court president, she has led national and international reform initiatives in judicial transparency, access to justice, and institutional accountability. Her academic and professional work bridges legal education, applied research, and justice sector development, with a strong focus on non-custodial sanctions, public trust, and ethical governance. Dr. Olga Tešović can be reached at otolgates@gmail.com.

Abstract

Judicial transparency has increasingly emerged as a central pillar of people-centered justice and institutional legitimacy. This article reflects on my role as a keynote speaker at the International Association for Court Administration (IACA) Annual Conference in Dubai, where I presented a framework for understanding and operationalizing judicial transparency as a driver of public trust. The article is conceptually and empirically grounded in my peer reviewed research *Conceptualizing Judicial Transparency and Public Trust - Frameworks for Community Centered Justice* [1], which served as the primary theoretical foundation for the keynote presentation. Drawing on comparative international examples, conference discussions, and professional exchanges with court leaders from around the world, the article explores how institutional, procedural, and perceptual transparency can be translated into practical reforms that strengthen legitimacy, inclusivity, and trust in contemporary justice systems.

1. Introduction: Dubai as a Global Platform for Justice Reform

The IACA Annual Conference in Dubai brought together court administrators, judges, scholars, and justice sector leaders from across the globe to engage in a substantive dialogue on the future of court administration and people-centered justice. Hosted in one of the world's most dynamic and rapidly

transforming legal environments, the conference provided an ideal setting for examining how innovation, transparency, and trust intersect in modern justice systems.

I was honored to participate as a keynote speaker in Plenary Session #5, titled "Transparency in Action: Practical Pathways to Building Public Trust in People Centered Justice Systems", within the thematic track People Centered Justice. The session was co presented with Dr. Tim Bunjevca (Australia), IACA President Elect. According to the official conference agenda, the plenary addressed the pressing question of how transparency can be operationalized to improve access to justice and strengthen institutional legitimacy across diverse jurisdictions.

This article builds directly upon my peer reviewed scholarly work *Conceptualizing Judicial Transparency and Public Trust – Frameworks for Community Centered Justice*, published in *Law – Theory and Practice* in 2025 [1]. That research provided the analytical and conceptual foundation for the keynote presentation and framed the comparative and practical discussions that followed during the conference.

2. Judicial Transparency as a Multidimensional Concept

Judicial transparency is frequently invoked in reform discourse, yet it is often treated as a vague or purely formal requirement. My research argues that transparency must be understood as



a multidimensional and relational concept, one that extends beyond information disclosure and into the lived experience of court users [1].

The framework presented in Dubai conceptualizes transparency through three interrelated dimensions:

1. Institutional transparency
2. Procedural transparency
3. Perceptual transparency

This tripartite model, developed through comparative research and interdisciplinary theory, enables judicial systems to assess not only what information is disclosed, but how justice is structured, experienced, and perceived by the public [1].

The legitimacy of judicial institutions depends not solely on legal authority, but on public acceptance and trust - an insight well established in legitimacy theory and procedural justice scholarship [18, 4]. Transparency, when properly embedded, becomes a mechanism through which courts demonstrate accountability, fairness, and openness to the communities they serve.

3. Institutional Transparency: Opening the Structures of Justice

Institutional transparency refers to the openness of judicial institutions in their governance, decision making processes, and use of public resources. It includes transparency in judicial appointments, promotions, disciplinary procedures, budgeting, and performance data.

Comparative examples discussed during the keynote

illustrated how institutional transparency can strengthen legitimacy when implemented consistently. Canada’s open access legal information model (CanLII) provides free public access to judicial decisions and legislation, reinforcing accountability and legal certainty [8]. South Africa’s Judicial Service Commission publicly conducts judicial appointment interviews, enabling citizens to observe and evaluate the integrity of the selection process [13].

My research highlights that formal guarantees of judicial independence are insufficient if institutional practices remain opaque or inconsistent [1]. In Serbia, for example, while constitutional safeguards exist, empirical findings reveal that perceptions of political influence persist due to limited transparency in decision making and governance processes [6].

Digital innovation was also a key topic of discussion in Dubai. Platforms such as the European Court of Human Rights’ HUDOC database demonstrate how open judicial data can enhance institutional accountability at an international level [7]. Emerging technologies, including blockchain, were discussed as potential tools for creating tamper proof judicial records and transparent tracking of court expenditures, although concerns regarding governance and oversight remain [2].

4. Procedural Transparency: Making Justice Understandable and Accessible

Procedural transparency focuses on how clearly and accessibly judicial processes are conducted and communicated. For many court users, complexity, legal jargon, and unpredictability are major barriers to trust and engagement[3].

continued

During the plenary session, several international practices were highlighted as effective tools for improving procedural clarity. New Zealand's use of plain language judgments enables non lawyers to understand judicial reasoning without compromising legal rigor [9]. Finland's comprehensive reform emphasizing orality, immediacy, and concentration has improved both efficiency and public comprehension of court proceedings [12].

The COVID 19 pandemic accelerated the global adoption of virtual hearings and e filing systems, raising important questions about procedural fairness and access to justice. Empirical research indicates that while digital tools can enhance efficiency, they must be carefully designed to avoid exacerbating inequality or undermining due process [15]. In Serbia, analysis of remote trial implementation revealed both progress and procedural risks, particularly in criminal proceedings [14].

Also, in Serbia, pilot initiatives supported by international partners have introduced simplified procedural guides, remote access mechanisms, and public court dashboards. These reforms align with the analytical findings of my earlier work, which emphasize that procedural transparency must be user centered rather than system centered [1]. International comparative studies on remote judging further support this claim, underscoring the need for consistent human rights safeguards [16].

5. Perceptual Transparency: Trust as a Social Experience

Perhaps the most challenging dimension of transparency is perceptual transparency - the way justice is experienced and interpreted by the public. Trust is shaped not only by institutional design, but by narratives, media representation, and personal encounters with the justice system. Judicial reputation plays a crucial role in shaping both elite and public perceptions, as explored in comparative studies [10].

Research consistently shows that even well designed systems may suffer from low trust if public perceptions are misaligned with institutional realities [18]. Media coverage plays a critical role in shaping these perceptions, often amplifying scandals while overlooking everyday transparency efforts [5]. This dynamic is particularly evident in criminal justice, where media representation can either build or erode public confidence depending on editorial framing [17].



During the Dubai conference, community based models from Rwanda illustrated how participatory mechanisms can enhance perceptual transparency. Rwanda's Abunzi mediation committees integrate culturally embedded dispute resolution into the justice system, fostering legitimacy through local ownership and dialogue [1].

My research underscores that perceptual transparency requires sustained engagement, not symbolic gestures. Transparency initiatives that fail to produce tangible improvements risk being perceived as performative rather than transformative [1].

6. Technology, Transparency, and Ethical Boundaries

Technology featured prominently throughout the conference discussions. Artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, and digital court platforms were presented as tools capable of enhancing transparency and efficiency. AI powered chatbots, for example, can guide users through court procedures and explain legal terminology in accessible language [15].

However, both my keynote and the underlying research emphasized that technology is not a neutral solution. Risks such as algorithmic bias, digital exclusion, data privacy concerns, and the "black box" problem of opaque decision making must be addressed through ethical design and robust oversight frameworks [11].

The key message resonating from Dubai was clear: technology should support human centered justice, not replace judicial reasoning or accountability.

7. The Keynote Experience: Dialogue, Exchange, and Professional Learning

The plenary session generated an active and substantive exchange with participants from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Questions from court administrators and judges focused on balancing transparency with judicial independence, measuring public trust, and adapting reforms to different cultural contexts.

Co presenting with Dr. Tim Bunjevac enriched the session by combining theoretical frameworks with practical governance tools. While my contribution emphasized conceptual clarity and comparative analysis, his intervention focused on performance measurement and institutional leadership, creating a complementary and dynamic discussion.

One of the most valuable aspects of the conference was informal networking. Conversations with colleagues from Kenya, Central Asia, and Latin America revealed strikingly similar challenges despite differing legal traditions. These exchanges reaffirmed a central insight of my research: transparency is universally relevant, but always context dependent [1].

8. Reflections on Dubai as a Symbolic and Practical Setting

Dubai itself offered a powerful metaphor for justice transformation. The city's rapid development, multicultural environment, and investment in legal infrastructure underscored the importance of adaptability and innovation. Visiting modern court facilities alongside heritage districts highlighted the possibility of reform that respects tradition while embracing change.

For me, the conference was not merely a professional event, but a reaffirmation of the importance of global dialogue in justice reform. Transparency and trust are not challenges any system can resolve in isolation.

9. Conclusion: Transparency as a Continuous Commitment

The IACA Conference in Dubai confirmed the central conclusion of the underlying research: judicial transparency strengthens public trust only when it is substantive, participatory, and context sensitive [1].

Transparency is not a checklist, nor a one time reform. It is a continuous institutional culture that must be nurtured through openness, communication, and engagement. When courts invite the public into the justice conversation, through accessible procedures, accountable governance, and respectful dialogue, they reinforce both legitimacy and democratic values.

As justice systems worldwide confront growing expectations and complex societal challenges, transparency remains one of the most powerful tools for ensuring that justice is not only done, but also seen, understood, and trusted by the public.

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The Power of Global Exchange: Strategic Planning Lessons from IACA Dialogue

Reflections from the 2025 IACA Conference in Dubai “Global Perspectives on Court Administration”

By: Olga Comerzan, Strategic Planning Consultant



Olga Comerzan attended the Dubai conference as strategic planning specialist with extensive experience in court administration, monitoring and evaluation, and access to justice programming across Europe. Her presentation during the Dubai Conference was entitled “Strategic Planning in Judicial Excellence: Empowering Courts to Develop and Respond to Challenges.” Prior to her current position, Ms. Comerzan was a strategic planning consultant within USAID “Model Court Initiative” and “Justice and Anti-corruption Reform Activity” in Moldova. Currently based in Dubai, Ms. Comerzan may be reached at olga.comerzan@gmail.com

Drawing on insights from the 2025 IACA Dubai Conference, where 330 delegates from over 50 countries exchanged experiences, this article examines strategic planning as a practical management instrument for courts. The author argues that effective strategic planning must evolve from compliance documentation into an embedded operational tool, requiring leadership vision, stakeholder engagement, ruthless prioritization, and adaptive implementation. Comparing experiences from Moldova’s resource-constrained environment to Dubai’s technological leadership demonstrates that while contexts differ dramatically, the fundamental methodology remains consistent when anchored in clear vision and realistic capacity assessment.

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

Benjamin Franklin

Imagine walking into a courtroom in 1950, then stepping into one today. The robes are identical, the gavels unchanged, and procedures almost the same. Now imagine a hospital, bank, or even grocery store from 1950 versus today, the transformation would be breathtaking. This paradox captures

courts’ central challenge: while justice itself is timeless, the culture of justice must evolve. Today, strategic planning has evolved into essential instruments of judicial survival and excellence.

The 2025 IACA Conference demonstrated strategic planning as core administrative practice. My journey to this conference was both professional and personal: having worked extensively in strategic planning for Moldova’s courts, I was simultaneously exploring Dubai as a potential family relocation. This convergence created a unique opportunity to share Moldova’s experience in implementing the strategy in context of extraordinary challenges, to learn from Dubai’s futuristic court administration, and to gain insight into the experience of other countries in this field.

Dubai: Where Vision Becomes Institutional Reality

Dubai has become synonymous with the impossible made tangible. Beyond the impressive lies a deeper achievement: four million people from nearly every nation coexisting

continued

productively, innovating in ways previously unimaginable. This rests not on resources alone but on disciplined application of strategic vision to every institutional dimension.

Dubai Courts headquarters revealed this through details both grand and subtle. A daycare center for employees' children near the entrance, and more strikingly, the first office encountered is labeled not "Customer Service" but "Customer Happiness", a distinction revealing profound commitment. Customer service manages relationships reactively; customer happiness generates genuinely positive experiences through services oriented toward real beneficiary needs.¹

At the Supreme Court, symbolically located on the top floor as the highest judicial authority, each courtroom features glass pyramid skylights above where parties stand. "You see them?" officials explained. "They symbolize that this court is transparent." These elements reflect deeper truth: nothing happens by chance in Dubai. Everything serves purpose, follows planning, and centers on people, generating the customer happiness that attracts investment, drives growth, and ensures development.

During a fortunate encounter with Emirati Professor Dr. Mohamed Said, an expert in strategic planning, I shared frustrations about introducing these concepts to courts in developing contexts. His response was illuminating: "Did you see Dubai? It's not about being biggest or richest. It's about vision and leadership. From there comes human potential, the sky is the limit, technology, development, all people centered." His words reflected leadership philosophy articulated by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum: sustainable achievement requires first imagining what seems impossible, then systematically planning its realization.²

Strategic Planning as Management Instrument, Not Declaration

Since the mid-1990s, courts have adopted strategic planning frameworks³ inspired by public sector reform. Yet conference discussions revealed the persistent challenge is not absent strategies but difficulty translating them into operational, measurable practice. Too often, strategic plans become compliance exercises to satisfy oversight bodies, bearing little relationship to daily institutional reality.

The purpose was to reconceptualize strategic planning as management instrument that supports court administration in several ways.

First, it preserves judicial independence while strengthening

administrative accountability. Clear administrative goals, improving efficiency, enhancing services, advancing digitalization, strengthen credibility without interfering with adjudication. Dubai's courts demonstrated how administrative excellence can coexist with judicial autonomy through technology-driven planning focused on both delivery and decisions.

Second, effective strategy bridges vision and operations. Drawing from Maslow's hierarchy⁴, institutions struggling to survive cannot pursue sophisticated objectives, yet this should not excuse inaction. Strategic planning serves institutions at every developmental stage. For courts in survival mode, strategy focuses on stabilization; beyond survival, it enables innovation. The methodology remains consistent; content adapts to context. Successful strategy translates vision into operational plans, departmental objectives, and individual performance expectations. Without this vertical alignment, plans float above organizational reality.

Third, modern strategic planning rests on evidence: case duration metrics, backlog trends, user satisfaction data, staff commitment. Without reliable evidence, strategy becomes speculative. Yet perfect data should not exclude action. Courts can begin with available information while building capacity for better data, an iterative approach proving more effective than waiting for ideal conditions.

Persistent Global Challenges

Despite decades of experience, courts worldwide confront remarkably similar obstacles. The conference provided forums where specialists shared not only successes but failures and ongoing struggles. Four challenges emerged with particular consistency.

The compliance exercise trap. In many jurisdictions, strategic plans primarily satisfy external stakeholders, ministries, donors, and oversight bodies. This produces documents that are overly broad, disconnected from operational capacity, and rarely revisited after adoption. One administrator described her strategic plan as "a beautiful document that everyone praises and nobody reads." This confession prompted similar admissions. Dubai discussions emphasized that genuine ownership by court leadership, viewing strategy as their management tool, is essential.

Leadership turnover and institutional amnesia. Judicial leadership typically rotates every few years, especially in systems where the role of court manager is assimilated by

the chief justice. Strategic plans often become identified with particular leaders, quietly disappearing when leadership changes. It is crucial to maintain strategic coherence across leadership cycles, creating institutional memory transcending individual tenures.

Resistance to change. Strategic planning introduces uncomfortable changes. Resistance intensifies when staff perceive strategy as imposed on them rather than created with them. Following my presentation on strategic planning, I received several questions about how courts were motivated to engage in the strategic planning exercise and how staff involvement was ensured. Drawing on my experience with Moldovan courts, the key factor was genuine participation. Once staff realized that their ideas were truly taken into consideration and later reflected in the final strategic plan, they developed a sense of ownership. The plan became their document, rooted in their institutional reality, which, in turn, led to strong commitment and enthusiastic implementation.

Resource constraints and credibility. When objectives bear no realistic relationship to available resources, planning loses credibility. Yet constraints need not preclude effective planning. Strategies can specify what current resources enable, what incremental funding increases permit, and what substantial investment requires. This tiered approach maintains ambition while preserving credibility.

Learning from Dubai: Strategic Planning in Transformation

Dubai offered unique perspectives on strategic planning within rapid institutional growth and technological advancement. While many courts struggle with incremental change, Dubai courts navigate transformational change as standard operating procedure. This is fascinating for observing how strategic planning functions under conditions of acceleration rather than stability. Three key lessons emerged from plenary presentations, court visits, and informal exchanges, proving surprisingly applicable far beyond Dubai's specific context, offering insights even for courts operating under entirely different circumstances.

Strategic adaptability as core competency. Traditional planning assumes stable environments where five-year plans remain relevant throughout. Dubai's experience demonstrates necessity of adaptive strategy: long-term vision paired with flexible implementation. Their 2025 strategy includes regular

review mechanisms and explicit authorization for mid-course corrections.⁵ DIFC Court exemplified this: they maintained almost 100% of hearings through videoconferencing during pandemic not because they predicted COVID-19 but because their planning emphasized building flexible technological capacity adaptable to unforeseen challenges. Now they pioneer spatial justice frameworks, forward-thinking grounded in adaptive planning rather than rigid prediction.

Technology as strategic enabler, not destination. Dubai treats digitalization not as end itself but as enabler of broader objectives, access, efficiency, satisfaction, and transparency. This distinction resonates across development contexts. Technology becomes affordable when it measurably advances core strategic objectives. Case management systems seem expensive compared with manual tracking costs and delays. This instrumental view, technology as means rather than end, helps courts at all resource levels make better investment decisions.

Stakeholder engagement as foundation. Effective planning incorporates systematic feedback from court users, legal professionals, and partner institutions. This stakeholder-centered approach ensures strategies respond to real needs while reinforcing public trust. Dubai's commitment to customer happiness manifests through sophisticated feedback mechanisms embedded throughout service delivery. These elements are among the few that are monitored, evaluated, and systematically reported at the governmental level of the United Arab Emirates and applies to all public institutions.

Essential Elements of Effective Strategy

Based on global practice, several elements consistently distinguish effective strategic planning. These form an integrated system; weakness in any component undermines the whole.

Ruthless prioritization focuses on limited achievable goals rather than comprehensive wish lists. A plan listing 50 objectives provides no strategic guidance; identifying five priorities for concentrated effort actually directs institutional energy. Everything matters, not everything matters equally.

Operational linkage connects strategy to budgets, staffing, and workflows. When reviewing budget requests, evaluators should ask: "Which strategic priority does this advance?" This linkage makes strategy the language of institutional decision-making.

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Performance monitoring provides feedback when implemented thoughtfully. Indicators should function as learning instruments, not punishment tools. The goal is understanding what works, enabling continuous improvement. When measurement becomes punitive, staff game metrics rather than improve performance.

Communication excellence ensures judges, staff, and stakeholders understand both strategy and their implementation roles. The best plan fails if institutional members remain unaware or unclear about responsibilities. Effective courts communicate strategy through multiple channels, making it part of institutional conversation.

Regular review processes treat strategy as living documentation requiring periodic refresh. Annual reviews assess progress, identify obstacles, celebrate successes, and make adjustments. Successful courts use strategy as shared administrative language embedded in daily practice, not merely formal publications gathering dust.

The Indispensable Element: Vision and Leadership

Throughout the conference, discussions circled back to fundamental reality: strategic planning's technical components matter far less than the leadership vision and commitment animating them. Vision without planning remains fantasy, planning without vision becomes procedure. The integration creates transformational potential.

A member of Moldova's Superior Council of Magistracy articulated this precisely: "The real problem is not structures or processes. The real problem is lack of clear leadership vision." This applies far beyond Moldova. Courts struggle less with planning methodology, which is well-documented, than with generating and sustaining leadership vision giving methodology purpose and direction.

Understanding Strategic Integration: The Prism and Lens

To help court leaders grasp strategic planning's organizational impact, I use a physics analogy. Imagine a court as a beam of light. When light passes through a prism, it refracts into distinct colours, representing a department, a process, or a person, all important, but now separated, uncoordinated, and sometimes even in competition with each other.

A prism-like organization produces visible activity but lacks synergy. Leadership becomes reactive, responding to

each stream separately like a rainbow effect - beautiful, but dispersed, temporary, and dependent on external conditions.

Now imagine placing a lens. Rather than dispersing, light focuses. A lens represents strategic vision and leadership, aligning all rays toward common goals. When leadership creates clear vision, the focal point, organizations become coherent, producing powerful outcomes. A magnifying glass demonstrates this: dispersed sunlight provides warmth and focused sunlight ignites fire. Strategic planning transforms prism systems into lens systems, aligning fragmented efforts into coherent vision.

Strategic Planning Across the Development Spectrum

The 2025 IACA Conference prompted fundamental questions that have profound implications for how we conceptualize strategic planning's role: Is strategic planning primarily for addressing immediate challenges and closing capability gaps, as exemplified by Moldova's experience, helping courts evolve, align with international standards, and build foundational competencies? Or is it fundamentally for driving breakthrough innovation and pioneering new approaches, as demonstrated by Dubai Courts' 2025 strategy, creating institutional futures?

Moldova's experience demonstrates strategic planning as an evolutionary tool, essential for institutional survival and gradual improvement. Operating under severe resource constraints that limit investment in new technologies and comprehensive training, while also confronting regional conflict, refugee inflows, energy crises, and economic instability, and managing a post-Soviet institutional legacy requiring a fundamental cultural shift in how courts understand their public service role and rebuild public trust after decades of systemic dysfunction, the justice system has undergone multiple judicial mapping exercises and reforms, including integrity vetting processes that resulted in the departure of over 70% of judges. Moldova's courts use strategic planning primarily for stabilization and incremental advancement. Plans focus necessarily on essential capabilities: reliable case management systems that prevent file loss and delay, basic technological infrastructure enabling efficient information sharing, fundamental staff competencies in customer service and procedural fairness, minimal service standards that citizens can reasonably expect. Success in this context means preventing further institutional deterioration and achieving small but consistent improvements, less

dramatic than transformation, perhaps, but absolutely essential for institutional survival and gradual legitimacy building.

Dubai's model represents nearly opposite circumstances: rapid economic growth generating substantial public revenues, considerable resources enabling ambitious technological investments, visionary leadership explicitly mandating global judicial excellence, sophisticated technological infrastructure already in place, and explicit mandate to pioneer innovations that other courts will eventually follow. Their 2025 strategy pursues breakthrough innovations: comprehensive artificial intelligence integration throughout judicial processes from case assignment to decision analysis, sophisticated predictive analytics enabling proactive caseload management and resource allocation, complete digitalization creating foundations for spatial justice frameworks addressing disputes in virtual environments, proactive access to justice initiatives that anticipate barriers before they manifest rather than only reacting to exclusion after it occurs. Success in Dubai means establishing and maintaining global leadership in judicial innovation, continually pushing boundaries of what courts can accomplish.

These contexts appear not different but incomparable, and in resource terms, they genuinely are. Yet both employ strategic planning with remarkable effectiveness because both have achieved the essential prerequisite: clarity of vision aligned with realistic assessment of current capacity and probable trajectory. Moldova's strategic plans don't attempt to mimic Dubai's innovations. That would be delusional fantasy disconnected from reality. Dubai's plans don't focus on basic competencies that Moldova still works to build. That would wastefully underutilize their considerable advantages. Each context demands fundamentally different content while employing remarkably similar methodology. The profound lesson transcending these apparent differences is that strategic planning serves both purposes, and everything along the spectrum between them. It helps institutions survive existential crises through focused prioritization and creative resource optimization. Simultaneously, it drives breakthrough innovation when vision, leadership, and capacity fortunately align. Whether starting from significant capability gaps or substantial institutional strengths, whether operating in Moldova or Dubai or anywhere across that development spectrum, strategic planning ultimately concerns three interconnected elements: absolute clarity of vision about institutional purpose and direction, honest assessment

of current reality and likely trajectory, and systematic methodology for strategically closing gaps between present reality and desired future state. Context determines content; methodology remains remarkably, even surprisingly, consistent.

IACA's Essential Platform for Global Collaboration

Among the conference's most valuable dimensions was exchanging successes, failures and ongoing struggles through honest international dialogue. Courts can adapt proven approaches, avoid repeating mistakes, and gain confidence that challenges are neither unique nor insurmountable. IACA conferences provide unique platforms where theory meets practice, where administrators learn from formal presentations and informal conversations. These exchanges create communities of practice persisting beyond conference dates. For someone working in Moldova's challenging context, exposure to Dubai's achievements provided inspiration rather than discouragement, understanding that similar fundamental challenges cross borders, and practical strategies immediately applicable. This is IACA's irreplaceable contribution: creating spaces where excellence anywhere elevates standards everywhere.

Conclusion: The Imperative of Strategic Action

While strategic planning became standard practice in court administration, the fundamental challenge has shifted. The question is no longer whether courts should plan strategically, that debate is settled, but how those plans are used: as compliance documents satisfying external requirements, or as genuine instruments of institutional transformation.

As courts worldwide face mounting complexity, from technological disruption to changing expectations about access and transparency, from resource constraints to demographic shifts altering demand patterns, the imperative for effective strategic planning intensifies. Courts can no longer afford the luxury of reactive management, responding to each crisis as it emerges without broader strategic framework guiding their evolution.

Strategic planning must remain practical, grounded firmly in institutional reality rather than borrowed wholesale from other contexts. A plan effective for Dubai's courts may prove entirely inappropriate for Moldova's circumstances, and vice versa. What travels across borders is methodology, not content. It must remain adaptive, continuously adjusting to changing

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circumstances rather than rigidly pursuing obsolete objectives. The world changes too rapidly for static five-year plans.

Strategic planning must remain participatory, engaging judges and administrative staff as active partners in both planning and implementation rather than treating them as passive executors of decisions made elsewhere. People support what they help create, a principle validated repeatedly across diverse court systems. And crucially, strategic planning must remain embedded in daily administrative practice: the language leaders use when making decisions, the framework staff reference when setting priorities, the logic connecting budget allocations to strategic objectives.

Whether facing immediate survival challenges or pursuing ambitious innovations, whether operating in emerging democracies still building institutional foundations or established systems seeking continuous improvement, courts worldwide share this fundamental truth: strategic planning works when it moves decisively from declaration to daily practice, from symbolic documentation to living instrument of institutional transformation.

The 2025 IACA Conference in Dubai brought together judicial leaders, demonstrating that, regardless of the judicial systems or resource environments in which we operate, court administrators face remarkably similar challenges and concerns – a unique possibility for collective reflection, shared experiences, past mistakes, and lessons learned. Through both structured panel discussions and informal professional interactions, complemented by thoughtfully designed cultural activities, the conference fostered emerging international partnerships.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all participants for their insightful contributions, especially to Kevin Bowling, Chief Administration Officer of IACA, and to Zenell Brown, Regional Court Administrator at the Michigan Supreme Court, for their professional support and guidance throughout this journey, and also, to the entire IACA team and the DIFC Courts for hosting and organizing an exceptional conference that meaningfully advanced international dialogue and collaboration in judicial administration.

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Judge-Led Dispute Resolution as Institutional Design: Reflections on Singapore’s Judicial Dispute Resolution Network from the IACA 2025 Dubai Conference

By Dr. Emad Hussein, Independent Arbitrator and Accredited Mediator



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This article examines Singapore’s approach to judge-led dispute resolution through the dual lenses of its domestic Court Dispute Resolution Cluster (CDRC) and the international Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (JDRN). Drawing on discussions from the IACA 2025 Dubai Conference, it explores how judicial dispute resolution can be embedded as institutional design rather than individual practice. The article highlights the implications of these frameworks for court administrators, particularly in relation to system architecture, legitimacy, and sustainable judicial reform.

I. Setting the Scene: Why This Session Mattered

Among the many plenary and breakout discussions at the IACA 2025 Conference in Dubai, the session devoted to Judge-Led Court Dispute Resolution, Asynchronous Hearings, Early Neutral Evaluations & International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (JDRN) emerged as a focal point for sustained engagement and reflection. While the conference programme covered a wide range of themes—including digital courts, artificial intelligence, court governance, and administrative innovation—this particular session drew attention to a more foundational question confronting courts globally: how judicial institutions can

adapt their internal processes to deliver justice that is not only legally sound, but timely, proportionate, and responsive to the needs of court users.

The significance of this session must be understood against the broader context of the conference itself. Hosted by the Dubai Courts and the DIFC Courts, the IACA 2025 Conference brought together more than 350 delegates from over 50 jurisdictions, representing common law, civil law, and mixed legal systems. Despite differences in legal culture and institutional structure, participants repeatedly identified similar systemic pressures—growing caseloads, limited judicial resources, escalating litigation costs, and heightened public expectations for efficiency and accessibility. These shared challenges created fertile ground for comparative learning.

Within this environment, Singapore was presented not as a conceptual experiment, but as an established institutional response to these pressures. Singapore’s approach to judicial dispute resolution has evolved through a deliberate domestic policy choice to integrate structured, judge-led settlement processes into the formal court system. This policy is operationalised through the Court Dispute Resolution Cluster (CDRC), which forms part of the judiciary’s internal

case management architecture. Separately, Singapore has also played a leading role in convening international dialogue on judicial dispute resolution through the Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (JDRN).

The Dubai setting further amplified the relevance of this discussion. Both the Dubai Courts and the DIFC Courts have pursued ambitious reform agendas grounded in leadership vision and administrative capacity. Hosting a session focused on how Singapore has embedded judicial dispute resolution domestically while also encouraging international dialogue and information-sharing on the same encouraged participants to think critically about how institutional models travel across borders—not as replicas, but as sources of inspiration adaptable to local realities. In this sense, the session exemplified the core mission of IACA: fostering informed dialogue that bridges jurisdictions while respecting institutional diversity.

II. Singapore's Domestic Judicial Dispute Resolution Framework: The Court Dispute Resolution Cluster (CDRC)

Singapore's approach to judicial dispute resolution at the domestic level is anchored in the Court Dispute Resolution Cluster (CDRC) of the State Courts, which institutionalises alternative dispute resolution as a core component of judicial case management. The CDRC reflects an explicit policy choice by the judiciary to encourage parties in civil cases, criminal matters, and community disputes to explore dispute resolution options before proceeding to trial. Rather than operating as an informal settlement culture, the CDRC functions as a structured, judge-driven framework through which dispute resolution is integrated into the formal court process, with referrals initiated either by the court or at the request of the parties at any stage of proceedings.

Under the CDRC, parties may be directed to or may request one of three principal modes of court dispute resolution: mediation, conciliation, or neutral evaluation. These processes are not positioned as alternatives external to litigation, but as calibrated judicial tools deployed within the life cycle of a case to promote earlier, more proportionate resolution. Where a matter is heard within the CDRC, parties participate in a judge-led court dispute resolution process designed to resolve disputes more expeditiously and economically than through full adjudication, while remaining firmly embedded within the judicial system.

A defining feature of the CDRC is its judge-led approach. Judges actively lead the dispute resolution process, drawing on their adjudicative expertise to facilitate discussions between the parties, to suggest possible solutions in conciliation, and, where appropriate, to provide a realistic, non-binding assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the case through neutral evaluation should the matter proceed to trial. This structured judicial involvement enhances the quality and credibility of the dispute resolution process while preserving its consensual character. The CDRC's design underscores the State Courts' view that judicial engagement in dispute resolution, when supported by clear procedures, safeguards, and transparency, can improve access to justice without undermining adjudicative neutrality.

Within the CDRC, the three dispute resolution processes are differentiated by the degree and nature of judicial intervention. Judicial mediation focuses on facilitating structured dialogue between parties, enabling them to articulate underlying interests and explore mutually acceptable outcomes in a confidential and consensual setting. Conciliation permits a more directive judicial role, allowing judges to suggest settlement options informed by their understanding of the dispute and the parties' positions, while leaving the ultimate decision with the parties. Early neutral evaluation (ENE) occupies a more evaluative space, in which a judge provides an early, impartial assessment of the legal and factual merits of the case, often to assist parties in realistically appraising litigation risk and narrowing the issues in dispute. Together, these processes offer a graduated spectrum of judicial engagement, enabling the court to match the dispute resolution method to the characteristics and complexity of each case.

The scope of matters addressed through the Court Dispute Resolution Cluster is broad and reflects the judiciary's intent to deploy dispute resolution processes where they can add the greatest value. Typical cases include civil claims before the Magistrate's Court or District Court, as well as personal injury and non-injury motor accident claims, which are ordinarily channelled into neutral evaluation as a matter of course. The CDRC also plays a significant role in community-facing disputes, including complaints brought under the Community Disputes Resolution Act and the Protection from Harassment Act, as well as Magistrate's Complaints and private prosecutions.

continued

The CDRC framework is underpinned by features designed to promote accessibility, fairness, and party confidence. Participation in court dispute resolution is fundamentally voluntary, whether initiated by court referral or at the parties' request, and parties remain free to proceed to trial if resolution is not achieved. Costs are kept deliberately modest: dispute resolution under the CDRC is free for all Magistrate's Court cases and for specified categories of District Court matters, with a nominal fee payable only in other District Court cases. Proceedings are conducted on a confidential basis, and where a dispute is not resolved, the judge who facilitated the dispute resolution process will not hear the matter at trial. These safeguards ensure that judicial dispute resolution remains efficient and accessible while preserving adjudicative neutrality and procedural fairness.

The operation of the CDRC is further characterised by its emphasis on efficiency and practical accessibility. Dispute resolution is typically conducted over one to three sessions, with each session lasting approximately three hours, although more complex matters may require longer or additional sittings, and some disputes may be resolved within a single session. Proceedings may be conducted in person at the Court Dispute Resolution Chambers or remotely by video conference, reflecting the courts' commitment to flexibility and continuity of access to justice. These practical features complement the CDRC's low-cost and voluntary design, reinforcing its role as a proportionate and user-responsive component of judicial case management rather than an additional procedural burden.

Taken together, the CDRC illustrates how judicial dispute resolution can be systematically embedded within a domestic court system without diluting adjudicative integrity or procedural fairness. Singapore's experience with the CDRC demonstrates that judge-led dispute resolution, when carefully structured and supported by clear safeguards, can enhance efficiency, accessibility, and user confidence while remaining firmly anchored in the rule of law. This domestic foundation is significant not only in its own right, but also because it informs Singapore's engagement at the international level. Building on the institutional lessons and policy insights derived from the CDRC, Singapore has contributed to broader judicial dialogue through the JDRN, which operates as a distinct, international platform for comparative exchange and capacity-building rather than as an extension of domestic court practice.

III. The Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (JDRN): An International Platform for Institutional Exchange

Distinct from Singapore's domestic CDRC is the Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (JDRN), which was presented during the session as a non-binding and voluntary international network of like-minded judiciaries, rather than as an operational dispute resolution mechanism. The JDRN operates as a collaborative platform through which participating judiciaries collectively seek to promote the early, amicable, cost-effective, and fair resolution of court disputes through judge-led dispute resolution processes.

The JDRN's vision—advancing justice globally through excellence in judicial dispute resolution—reflects its aspiration to foster a global community of judiciaries committed to improving the administration of justice through proactive, judge-led case management and court-based alternative dispute resolution. Its mission is to support the adoption and development of judicial dispute resolution practices within judicial systems worldwide, with a particular emphasis on early intervention, proportionality, and efficient use of judicial resources. In this sense, the JDRN is concerned not with individual cases, but with strengthening institutional capacity and systemic design across jurisdictions.

As an international forum, the JDRN provides a structured space for judges and court administrators to share experiences, exchange ideas, and develop expertise relating to judicial settlement conferences, early neutral evaluation, mediation, judge-facilitated negotiations, and other court ADR modalities. These exchanges enable comparative reflection on how judicial dispute resolution can be integrated into case management frameworks while respecting due process, confidentiality, and judicial impartiality. Importantly, the JDRN does not prescribe a single model of judicial dispute resolution; rather, it supports jurisdictions in adapting core principles to their own legal traditions, procedural rules, and institutional cultures.

A central objective of the JDRN is the development and dissemination of standards and best practices to serve as benchmarks for jurisdictions seeking to institutionalise judicial dispute resolution within their court systems. Alongside this normative function, the network places strong emphasis on capacity building, providing access to shared knowhow and resources aimed at enhancing judicial competencies in

managing disputes through non-adjudicative means. This focus on institutional design, training frameworks, and ethical boundaries reflects a recognition that sustainable judicial dispute resolution cannot depend solely on individual judicial initiative but requires coherent system-level support.

The JDRN's international character is underscored by its diverse membership, which currently comprises 21 member judiciaries drawn from 16 countries, representing a range of common law, civil law, and hybrid legal systems. Membership is institutional and voluntary, reinforcing the network's collaborative and non-binding nature, and preserving respect for national procedural autonomy and judicial independence. By bringing together judiciaries at different stages of adopting judicial dispute resolution, the JDRN facilitates peer learning while avoiding any implication of normative hierarchy.

In this way, the JDRN complements the CDRC framework. Whereas the CDRC functions as a national judicial policy instrument embedded within the State Courts' case management architecture, the JDRN operates at the level of international institutional dialogue and cooperation. Maintaining this distinction is essential: conflating the two risks obscuring both the practical effectiveness of Singapore's domestic judicial dispute resolution framework and the strategic significance of its contribution to global judicial reform through collaborative engagement.

IV. Why the JDRN Matters for Court Administrators

While the Judicial Dispute Resolution Network is often described in terms of judicial engagement and professional exchange, the session made clear that its relevance for court administrators lies at a different, structural level. The JDRN does not operate cases or intervene in domestic proceedings. Rather, it functions as an international platform through which administrators, alongside judges, can reflect on institutional design choices, governance frameworks, and system-level strategies for embedding judge-led dispute resolution within court systems.

From an administrative perspective, the value of the JDRN lies in its ability to surface comparative insights on how different judiciaries organise, support, and safeguard judicial dispute resolution. Court administrators are typically responsible for translating judicial policy into operational reality—through procedural rules, practice directions, allocation models, and support infrastructure. The JDRN

provides a forum in which administrators can examine how these design choices are made across jurisdictions, identify recurring challenges, and assess which elements may be adaptable to their own institutional contexts.

The session highlighted that sustainable judicial dispute resolution depends less on individual judicial enthusiasm than on administrative coherence. Issues such as role separation, confidentiality safeguards, data collection, and alignment with broader case management objectives are inherently administrative in nature. By focusing on institutional frameworks rather than case outcomes, the JDRN offers administrators a space to engage with reform as a matter of system architecture, rather than programme implementation.

In this sense, the JDRN speaks directly to IACA's core constituency. It reinforces the idea that court administrators are not merely implementers of judicial innovation, but co-designers of the justice system, whose decisions shape whether judge-led dispute resolution becomes a durable institutional function or remains an episodic initiative.

V. Lessons for Other Jurisdictions

Discussions following the session revealed strong interest among delegates in what other jurisdictions might learn from Singapore's experience, both domestically through the CDRC and internationally through the JDRN. A consistent theme, however, was the importance of adaptation rather than replication. The JDRN was not presented as a model to be transplanted wholesale, but as a mechanism for collective learning that respects institutional diversity.

One of the most transferable lessons identified was the importance of conceptual clarity. Jurisdictions considering judge-led dispute resolution must distinguish clearly between domestic operational frameworks—such as Singapore's CDRC—and international networks like the JDRN. Conflating these levels risks confusion over purpose, authority, and accountability. The session underscored that effective reform begins with a precise understanding of what problem is being addressed and at what institutional level.

Another lesson relates to sequencing and readiness. The Singapore experience suggests that international engagement through platforms such as the JDRN is most meaningful when grounded in a coherent domestic framework. Courts that have not yet articulated their own approach to judge-led resolution may benefit first from internal consolidation

continued

before engaging in international benchmarking. The JDRN supports this process by offering exposure to different stages of institutional development, rather than promoting a single reform trajectory.

Finally, participants noted that legitimacy concerns transcend legal traditions. Whether in common law, civil law, or hybrid systems, issues of consent, impartiality, and procedural fairness arise whenever judges engage in dispute resolution. The JDRN's emphasis on best practices and ethical boundaries provides a shared reference point for addressing these concerns without eroding judicial independence.

VI. Reflections from the IACA Conference Dialogue

The broader conference dialogue amplified the value of the JDRN session by situating it within a wider conversation about judicial modernisation. Informal exchanges with delegates suggested that many court systems are experimenting with judge-assisted settlement or evaluative practices in fragmented or informal ways, often driven by individual judges rather than institutional policy. Against this backdrop, the Singapore experience—viewed through both the CDRC and the JDRN—offered a coherent narrative of deliberate institutional design.

For many participants, the session reinforced the idea that innovation need not undermine judicial authority. On the contrary, when dispute resolution is embedded within the judicial institution and supported by clear administrative frameworks, it can enhance public confidence by demonstrating responsiveness and proportionality. The JDRN's role in facilitating dialogue on these issues helped participants move beyond anecdotal experience toward more systematic reflection.

Importantly, the session also highlighted the limits of international dialogue. Exposure to comparative practice does not eliminate the need for difficult domestic choices about resources, training, and procedural reform. The JDRN does not provide solutions, but it sharpens the questions that administrators and judges must ask of their own systems.

VII. Looking Ahead: Judge-Led Resolution as a Core Court Function

The discussion of Singapore's experience at the IACA 2025 Dubai Conference ultimately pointed toward a broader reconceptualization of judge-led dispute resolution—not as a technique, but as a form of institutional architecture. The combined lens of the CDRC and the JDRN illustrates how domestic operational frameworks and international knowledge networks can interact without collapsing into one another.

Looking ahead, the central challenge for courts is not whether adjudication should remain the core judicial function—it unquestionably should—but how adjudication can coexist with structured, authoritative pathways to resolution within the same institution. Singapore's experience suggests that these objectives are not in tension when supported by deliberate administrative design and clear role differentiation.

For court administrators, this perspective carries particular weight. The durability of judge-led dispute resolution depends on decisions made at the system level: how cases are channelled, how judges are supported, how safeguards are enforced, and how success is evaluated. The JDRN contributes to this conversation not by prescribing outcomes, but by enabling informed, comparative thinking about institutional choices.

In this sense, the IACA 2025 Conference fulfilled a critical function. By facilitating focused engagement with a mature and carefully articulated approach to judicial dispute resolution, it enabled court leaders to move beyond abstract endorsement toward practical, context-sensitive reflection. As courts worldwide confront increasing complexity and public scrutiny, such dialogue—grounded in institutional realism rather than reform enthusiasm—will be essential to sustaining justice systems that are both credible and responsive.



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Mindful Court Management: A Trauma-Informed Framework for Improving Justice Administration Outcomes

By: Giuseppe M. Fazari, Ph.D. Monmouth University, New Jersey, U.S.A.



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This article contends that effective court administration requires a trauma-informed, mindfulness-based approach that recognizes the prevalence of trauma among court-involved individuals and its influence on behavior, perceptions, and interactions within the justice system. Drawing upon contemporary trauma science and the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,¹ the article explains that behaviors often interpreted as defiance, disengagement, or indifference may instead represent adaptive responses to prior harm. Recognizing these dynamics has important implications for procedural fairness, participant compliance, and public

confidence in judicial institutions. The article further argues that court culture – including the design of physical spaces, the language used by court personnel, institutional policies, staff training, and interagency collaboration – can either exacerbate or mitigate the effects of trauma and therefore must be addressed at a systemic level. It concludes that trauma-informed courts strengthen accountability, institutional legitimacy, and justice outcomes by cultivating environments grounded in safety, respect, transparency, and an appreciation that individuals who enter the court system often bring complex personal histories shaped by prior adversity. The administration of justice rests on the principle

that courts must not only adjudicate disputes but must also foster environments that support dignity, safety, and respect for all who enter their doors. In recent years, the judiciary has increasingly confronted the reality that many court-involved individuals carry profound trauma histories that shape their behavior, perceptions, and interactions with court staff. These encounters, in aggregate, influence the effectiveness, legitimacy, and public trust in the justice system. As such, judges and court administrators must grapple with the operational implications of trauma—to understand how institutional policies, courtroom practices, and daily staff interactions can either reinforce trauma or mitigate its effects. The concept of court management mindfulness, grounded in trauma-informed principles, urges courts to become more aware of how organizational behavior intersects with human psychology. This awareness represents a vital step in cultivating court environments that enhance safety, procedural fairness, and public confidence.

Trauma is not merely an event of the past; it is a lived, embodied experience that reverberates through time. Bessel van der Kolk, a world-renowned trauma expert, observed that trauma is “re-experienced in the present...as profoundly disturbing physical sensations and emotions that may not

¹ The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is one of the most influential large-scale investigations examining the relationship between childhood adversity and adult health outcomes. Conducted between 1995 and 1997 through a collaboration between Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the study was led by Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda. Drawing on survey data from more than 17,000 adult members of Kaiser Permanente’s health system in Southern California, the research examined the prevalence of childhood abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction and their relationship to later physical, mental, and behavioral health outcomes. The findings demonstrated a strong and graded association between exposure to adverse childhood experiences and an increased risk of numerous health problems in adulthood.

be consciously associated with memories of past trauma.” This understanding is particularly salient for courts, where individuals are often expected to engage in complex cognitive processing – providing testimony, responding to questions, complying with instructions – within highly stressful and unfamiliar settings. Trauma can overwhelm these capacities, resulting in behaviors that the untrained observer may misinterpret as defiance, manipulation, or indifference. A trauma-informed court, however, recognizes such reactions as potentially adaptive responses to past harm rather than willful challenges to court authority.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, a cornerstone of trauma research, demonstrates that early exposure to abuse, neglect, parental mental illness, addiction, or household instability significantly increases the likelihood of later mental health disorders, substance use, chronic disease, and justice involvement. The ACE findings underscore that trauma is not confined to a select group. Instead, it is widespread and often cumulative. Many court-involved individuals have endured multiple adversities across their lifespan, which shape not only their choices but also their coping mechanisms. Vincent J. Felitti, one of the principal investigators of the ACE study, noted that problematic behaviors such as substance use or aggression may serve as short-term protective strategies – attempts by individuals to manage overwhelming psychological pain. Understanding these dynamics enables judges and administrators to approach litigant behavior with greater nuance and empathy. The prevalence of trauma among justice-involved populations is substantial. A significant proportion of adults and children in psychiatric treatment settings, substance use programs, and the prison or juvenile justice systems have documented trauma histories. Moreover, research increasingly illustrates the cyclical relationship between victimization and later offending, indicating that many individuals who present before the courts have been both victims and perpetrators at various points in their lives. The justice system often encounters individuals whose experiences of trauma intersect with mental health issues, physical health challenges, addiction, and poverty. A trauma-informed approach thus becomes not a peripheral consideration but a central administrative necessity.

At the heart of trauma-informed practice lies the notion of perspective – the understanding that the lens through which individuals interpret the world influences their responses.

Perspective is not fixed; it reflects one’s history of experiences, beliefs, and expectations. A traumatized mindset often narrows the capacity for reasoned choice, causing individuals to perceive threats even in neutral situations. By contrast, a present- and future-oriented mindset broadens the individual’s ability to consider options, weigh outcomes, and engage constructively. For court leaders, appreciating these divergent mindsets is essential for designing processes that do not inadvertently exacerbate fear, confusion, or re-traumatization. Every interaction between a court employee and a litigant carries the potential either to reinforce or alleviate trauma responses. This premise affirms a critical operational truth: no one in the court is unimportant. Whether a clerk, probation officer, or judicial assistant, each staff member across the administration spectrum contributes to the litigant’s experience of the court as a place of fairness, consistency,

and safety or, alternatively, as an institution of alienation and intimidation. Administrators and judges must therefore view the court as a holistic ecosystem in which culture, communication, environment, and procedures collectively shape outcomes.

One of the most visible manifestations of court culture is the physical environment. The traditional courthouse – often characterized by crowded hallways, wooden benches, bright lighting, and the general austere design – can intensify anxiety, especially for those with trauma histories. Destructive elements such as congested, noisy spaces, uncomfortable furnishings, siloed operations, and impersonal visual surroundings may inadvertently reinforce feelings of vulnerability, confusion, or hostility. Similarly, documentation practices that minimize client involvement or policies designed around organizational convenience rather than public need can alienate individuals who already feel powerless. Courts that redesign their spaces with trauma-informed principles (comfortable seating, clear signage, private interview areas, and calm, welcoming visual cues) help create an environment conducive to improved engagement and cooperation.

Language also plays a critical role. Destructive practices include bureaucratic inefficiencies, language barriers, and continued the use of questions that imply that something is inherently “wrong” with the person. Trauma-informed communication instead seeks to understand the experiences that may contribute to an individual’s current challenges.

continued

Court staff should avoid framing behaviors such as moral failings or personal defects, recognizing instead that many symptoms such as withdrawal, agitation, and impulsivity may reflect trauma adaptations. Constructive practices include transparent documentation, materials available in the person's primary language, and processes that solicit feedback about the court experience. Such efforts build trust and support procedural justice, which research consistently links to compliance and satisfaction. Implementing trauma-informed practices requires systematic attention to information gathering and staff preparation. Courts must ensure that biographical data collection is conducted with sensitivity and transparency, including the use of private interview settings that allow individuals to share information without fear of stigma or exposure. Training staff to recognize trauma symptoms and to manage interactions accordingly is equally important.

Without proper training, staff may misinterpret trauma-related behaviors as disrespect or resistance, resulting in punitive responses that escalate rather than diffuse the situation. Because trauma often intersects with multiple service systems including healthcare, education, social services, and law enforcement, effective court administration necessitates strong community partnerships. Initiatives such as Family Justice Centers, general education programs, mentoring services, diversion programs, and early interventions for belligerency demonstrate the benefits of integrated service delivery. Diversion programs that provide comprehensive and intensive services have shown particular success, reflecting the reality that multidimensional problems require multidimensional solutions. Court leaders, serving as legislative liaisons and subject matter experts, also play a critical role in informing policy and promoting system-wide collaboration.

The emergence of the Trauma-Informed Court model represents a significant evolution in judicial administration. A trauma-informed court acknowledges that individuals'

experiences and behaviors are shaped by larger systemic forces and that the court itself is part of this ecosystem. Such courts seek to increase awareness across all levels of the organization, improve the safety and social environment for staff and litigants alike, and elevate the quality of services delivered. By reducing negative encounters (moments of miscommunication, escalation, or misunderstanding) a trauma-informed approach creates a community rooted in hope and health rather than fear and punishment. Importantly, trauma-informed practice does not diminish accountability. Rather, it enhances the judiciary's ability to administer justice more effectively. When individuals feel understood, respected, and supported, they are more likely to comply with court orders, participate in treatment, and engage in rehabilitative

programming. A trauma-informed court aligns closely with the foundational goals of procedural fairness: voice, neutrality, respect, and trustworthy motives. Judges and administrators who adopt trauma-informed practices strengthen not only the individual experience but also the broader legitimacy of the justice system.

Ultimately, the principle that "everyone has a story" serves as a guiding ethos for the trauma-informed court. Each person who enters the courthouse comes with a unique history shaped by a range of adversarial challenges. A trauma-informed approach calls upon judges and administrators to recognize these complexities and to design court processes that support rather than undermine efforts to gain stability. Through intentional attention to environment, communication, training, and collaboration, courts can create spaces where healing, accountability, and justice coexist. In an era where courts face increasing demands, limited resources, and complex social challenges, trauma-informed court management is not merely an aspirational ideal but an operational imperative. By adopting mindfulness toward the human dimensions of justice administration, courts can better serve their communities, strengthen institutional legitimacy, and promote more equitable outcomes.

Reflections from Dubai Conference Attendees

Blog Insights -submitted by Brian McGlynn, IACA Sponsor “Cives”

The following excerpts are from the “Cives” conference blog.

It’s not every conference where you walk away with WhatsApp numbers instead of business cards—but the 2025 IACA (International Association of Court Administrators) Conference in Dubai was different in all the best ways.

Held at the Conrad Hotel in Dubai UAE, this truly international gathering brought together representatives and courts from over 50 countries, speaking almost as many languages, yet the event maintained a warm, intimate atmosphere with just under 500 high-profile delegates. From Chief Justices, Judges, Lawyers to CIOs to innovators... it felt less like a conference and more like a global roundtable.

And what a week it was!

Sunday: Setting the stage

We kicked off on Sunday evening with booth setup at the Conrad Dubai. By the time the sun set, the energy was already building. The President’s Reception gave us an early taste of the days ahead—vibrant conversations, meaningful exchanges, and a shared sense that something special was about to unfold.

Monday: Deep Conversations, Not Quick Pitches

When the conference officially opened on Monday, the tone was immediately refreshing. Unlike many trade shows where conversations can feel rushed, the dialogue here was thoughtful and substantial.

Our team—myself, our CEO Alfeo Pareschi, and Bilal from our Middle Eastern team—found ourselves speaking with court leaders from countries we had never expected to encounter. One memorable discussion was with the Kiribati Judiciary, whose unique island structure presents fascinating challenges and opportunities for digital transformation.

Justice without walls - Remote and Hybrid Courts

For us as a technology partner to courts around the world, the momentum behind hybrid and remote hearings didn’t come as a surprise—but witnessing it discussed so openly and confidently at IACA made it feel more real than ever. Court leaders shared how they’re already conducting thousands of

remote and hybrid proceedings each year, treating virtual access not as an add-on but as an essential part of modern justice. What excited us most was hearing judges and administrators talk not about whether these models work, but how to expand, refine, and future-proof them. Justice without walls is already here, and while we’ve helped build this movement, seeing its global adoption firsthand was both validating and deeply inspiring.

Tuesday: A Visit to Dubai Courts

Tuesday brought another full day of conversations at our booth—each one more fascinating than the last. We also had the privilege of joining the official visit to Dubai Courts, a journey that offered insight into one of the world’s most advanced judicial systems.

Meeting judges and administrators from around the globe during the excursion sparked new ideas, collaborations, and friendships.

A Grand Finale: The Gala Dinner

The week concluded with an elegant Gala Dinner in the stunning Avery Room at the Conrad Dubai. It was the perfect ending to a remarkable conference—celebratory, global, and full of inspiration.

A Truly Different Kind of Conference

IACA Dubai wasn’t just another event on the calendar. It was a unique blend of cultural immersion, professional collaboration, and human connection. We expect the conference to continue growing in the years ahead—but we hope it never loses the intimacy that makes it so meaningful.

For us, this week in Dubai reaffirmed something important:

Global justice innovation moves forward not just through technology, but through relationships.

And at IACA, we built many that we hope will last for years.

To view CIVES conference photos and to read more see:

<https://cives.ai/bloginsights/when-whatsapp-replaces-business-cards-our-incredible-week-at-iaca-dubai>

continued

The Dubai Courts Tour: A Vision of What's Possible

Excerpts Submitted by attendees Rachel Klagsbrun and Eliran Noy

The tour of the Dubai Courts was a powerful glimpse into what fully modernized, strategically funded systems can achieve. Their investment in technology, data, and user experience was inspiring, but it also reminded us that most courts operate in very different conditions.

Viewing Dubai's advanced systems in contrast with the realities of smaller jurisdictions underscored a key point for us: court technology needs to work at both ends of the scale.

It was our first opportunity to understand courts on their own terms, and to see how our longstanding experience in legal transcription intersects with the needs of public justice systems.

We came expecting to talk about technology.

We left thinking about governance, language, culture, and the future of justice.

