



## Would mediation work for you?

Anna Shields, JANUARY 30, 2013



**Not many would disagree that the recent release of the Government's Consultation on Workplace Disputes has put mediation at the forefront of organisational conflict management and, subsequently, right at the top of many senior HR professionals' agenda.**

And perhaps you've decided to make 2013 the year to introduce mediation into your organisation? But the question remains: where do you go from there? And should you consider developing your own in-house mediation expertise or outsource to specialists?

We have examined the experiences of leading private, public and third sector organisations and, with this user experience in mind, would suggest that there are four core models for the delivery of mediation. Of course, the approach that will work best for you depends on your organisation's size, mediation caseload and the extent to which you see conflict management as core to your organisation's culture. But essentially, whichever approach you adopt, it can be scaled up or down to suit your needs and resources.

We propose that the four core mediation models are: *ad hoc* mediation; outsourced mediation; an internal mediation scheme; and a mediation pilot. So, what's the difference and which one might work best for you?

The first option involves working on an *ad hoc* basis with an external mediation provider. This is most appropriate if your organisation is small, which may make it harder for users to trust in the impartiality of a mediator they know.

Debra Cadman, head of HR at consultancy firm, Capgemini, explains how she used *ad hoc* mediation: "The business has had cases where employees feel aggrieved at how they are treated, either by the company or someone they work with. We have tried, through all means possible, to correct the relationship and find a resolution to the conflict. In some cases, this has

not worked. And it is in those cases that using an external mediation provider can be extremely useful."

If levels of conflict in your organisation are higher, a more structured approach may be needed. With the outsourced mediation service, the management, monitoring and implementation of mediation can be outsourced to an external partner. This ensures smoother and more efficient case management than the *ad hoc* model and preserves the benefits of using third party specialists.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) opted for this model, supplemented by an element of in-house expertise. Colin Woodward, director of HR, IPCC said: "Although some internal mediation capability exists, our preference is an outsourced mediation service as this is seen to bring greater impartiality to the process, and consequently, higher levels of trust from staff."

For large organisations with a high mediation caseload, the best solution might be an internal mediation scheme. The main difference between this and outsourced mediation lies in training needs as you will need a pool of accredited in-house mediators who undergo specialist training and on-going support and professional development. [An internal scheme also involves training mediation referrers able to explain mediation to potential mediation users and help them decide whether they wish to engage in mediation.]

Despite the cost, offering mediation-related training can bring significant benefits as trained employees will use their conflict management skills in their everyday work. This, in turn, can contribute to a healthier approach to conflict in the organisation at large. This is something that leisure and gaming company, Rank Group, found when, as well as formally mediating within the business, delegates found that the skills they learned on the accredited course were transferable to their day jobs. At Rank, trained mediators were able to use their new skills to nip conflict in the bud.

The fourth core model is the internal mediation pilot, a scaled-down version of the internal mediation scheme. This involves sending a handful of employees on a public training course, therefore avoiding the heavier cost of an in-house training scheme, whilst communicating a clear message to your employees that your organisation takes conflict seriously.

In 2010, Cancer Research UK expanded its previously *ad hoc* use of mediation based on an increased awareness of the usefulness of informal resolution. The reasons for piloting mediation were to allow flexibility and keep costs down whilst building valuable skills within the organisation.

As demonstrated by various companies, regardless of the size and culture of your organisation, mediation can be implemented to suit specific needs and requirements to support you in addressing conflict more effectively.

**Anna Shields (pictured), director of Consensio, and Tania Coke, senior mediation consultant at Consensio.**