

Introducing workplace mediation at Sony

Becoming a workplace mediator was a life-changing experience for me, both on a professional and personal level. This wasn't what I expected before I attended the accredited mediation course. Given my numerous years in HR, I assumed that I would simply be enhancing an existing skillset.

Yet contrary to this, the skills that I learned and the self-awareness that I gained are some of the key life skills that have subsequently made my interactions and relationships at work and outside of work easier and more fulfilling.

However, these personal benefits were not the reason why I decided to qualify as a workplace mediator. My priority from the outset was simply to bring the benefits of effective conflict management and mediation to the Sony workplace.

It was with that ambition that I set out to explore the options and the training offerings available in the market and my mediation journey began when I qualified with mediation and conflict management specialists, Consensio.

Learning to unlearn

The accredited mediation training course took place over five full days and included a practical assessment on day six. Understanding more about the psychology of conflict and how workplace mediation works was fascinating.

The initial mediation role play practice was more challenging as I had to take off my 'HR hat' and learn to do things differently. My notepad was absent and I wasn't able to suggest solutions or direct the mediation parties' conversations. I also learnt not to be triggered or react to swearing or crying if this felt a natural and constructive element of the mediation process and individuals were truly expressing their feelings and emotions to the other party.

Whilst this felt uncomfortable and unfamiliar at the beginning, I quickly realised that it is liberating and rewarding to allow people in conflict the space and the time to really talk through the issues that are affecting them and then come up with viable solutions to their conflict.

Although I have to admit that it can at times feel frustrating in workplace mediations when parties go round and round in circles, I have found that the mediators' skills that I learnt in the training room really help people to talk with each other in a more open and honest manner and eventually move on from their conflict.

I have also developed my listening skills substantially, no bad thing for anyone. And I mean really listening, not just waiting to speak!

Mediation successes to date

At Sony, workplace mediation is now offered as a voluntary option for informal resolution prior to a formal grievance procedure. In addition, it can also be recommended after an investigation. Since my training, I have worked closely with Consensio to deliver mediation seminars and workplace mediation training for other members of the Sony HR team.

We now have a number of internal mediators in the business who are all passionate about the benefits of a mediated approach and who are all using the skills in their day-to-day work.

We have seen a 100% success rate in our workplace mediation service, which means that our business saves significant management time and associated costs. In addition, there has also been a reduction in formal grievances that have been put on hold due to effective mediation interventions.

As an employer, we have both a duty of care to our employees and an employer brand and reputation to protect and uphold. To date, all the anecdotal and data driven evidence strongly supports the argument that mediation is invaluable in helping to meet those ambitions.

So much so, in fact, that we are now encouraging the gradual roll out of mediation practices across Europe and fully anticipate realising similar benefits across other regions.