

## **The Essential Guide Workplace Mediation and Conflict Resolution Rebuilding Working Relationships**

***Nora Doherty and Marcelas Guyler (Kogan Page, 2008) – Eve Pienaar review***

This workplace conflict mediation guide provides a rich and wide ranging analysis of the use of mediation skills in workplace disputes and team facilitation. It is organised in three main sections: Part I - workplace mediation, how it works and a six step structure for the process; Part II – mediation in action, provides case studies for conflict between two colleagues, within a team and for boardroom conflicts; and Part III - reviewing the philosophy of mediation in organisational development. The chapters are clearly broken down into key issues and practical tips, and end with a bullet point summary of issues. The guide is engaging and easy to read, yet rich with some new thinking on the scope and potential reach of workplace mediation. Throughout the work the authors document and usefully bring together a wide range of psychological and organisational management theories to great effect.

In the first part of the work, the authors run through the essential tenets of mediation before considering the unique challenges that this practice represents within relationships at work. The section on where mediation “sits” within HR processes, and what it can and cannot deliver, will be useful to HR managers. The broader look at team dynamics and facilitation will be of use to all line managers. This part ends with a look at how different organisations might consider introducing mediation to their organisation, whether through the use of internal or specialist external workplace mediators.

The authors consider the nature of conflict and identify elements that can divide as well as suggesting the principles that can unite. There are some helpful suggestions as to how to work with team dynamics, which will be of interest to the workplace mediator practitioner. Looking at themes of inclusion, control and openness as a means of understanding the inner workings of a team, for instance, or analysing group dynamics from a group theory perspective, are of particular interest.

There is an evocative and helpful analysis of personality types at work (the “warrior”, the “pleaser”, the “hurt child”...) and a breakdown of some typical features of their interrelationships. There is also a perceptive analysis of discrimination cases and the pitfalls to avoid.

The second part gives a few case studies of how workplace conflict or tensions can be tackled at all levels of an organisation, to release productivity and enhance employee engagement. The authors provide a particularly compelling analogy of workplace mediation with “travelling through the eye of the storm”, really convincing the reader that there are few instances of workplace conflict which cannot at least be improved by mediation.

The third part of the work is fascinating, looking at the effect of conflict on individuals both physiologically and psychologically or emotionally. This is essential reading for practitioners in the field, as we share the journey and stress of an individual undergoing conflict and gain tools to better engage with these emotions in a positive way. There is a useful reminder of how to manage our “mind talk” and otherwise work on our practitioner skills. There are a few plugs for the authors’ Brief Mediation™ model but these are a helpful take on brief therapy tools and empowering of people in conflict.

The work concludes by looking “beyond mediation”, to propose a new culture of mediation skills as complementary to performance management. In this world, the concept of “responsible autonomy” will be seen to bring out the best in people while retaining accountability to the enterprise. Food for thought for managers and mediation practitioners alike, particularly in times of organisational change.

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