



Best practice in action:

Building resilience in local government through better conflict management



Key learning points

- How workplace conflict can jeopardise plans for the future as well as public services today, and how public sector employers are already mitigating that risk.
- How to drive up productivity, performance and wellbeing by proactively addressing the causes of conflict, whilst protecting against the recently renewed risks of grievance and employment tribunal.
- How to nip conflict in the bud in a day and at any level – discreetly, sensitively, constructively and cost-effectively.
- How to build the future without breaking as many eggs – enabling change that is more sustainable and an employer brand that is more compelling through the improvement of conflict management.

“Local government employers should leave no stone unturned when working to ensure a workforce that will deliver strategic objectives whilst meeting the needs of the communities they serve. Establishing our internal mediation service is one of the ways in which we have been enabling workforce change and creating workforce efficiency whilst enhancing employee relations and supporting our people.”

David Carter
Joint Managing Director
Warwickshire County Council

Unitary, district and borough council contributors

- Blaenau Gwent *
- East Hampshire *
- Havant *
- Isle of Wight
- Maidstone *
- Mole Valley *
- Portsmouth
- Rushmoor *
- Shepway
- Slough
- Swale *
- Taunton Deane
- West Somerset
- Winchester
- Wokingham
- Wycombe

County council contributors

- Buckinghamshire
- Hampshire
- Oxfordshire
- Surrey *
- Warwickshire *

Fire authority contributors

- Buckinghamshire *

** Feature contributors*

Foreword



Cllr Rory Love
Chairman, South East Employers

Member, Shepway District and Kent County Councils

Member Peer, Local Government Association

**Board Member and Trustee,
The Workforce Development Trust**

Nothing spurs innovation like disruption and necessity. Today, local government is a dynamic melting pot of ideas, exploration, and experimentation. We are all seeking to build new models to serve our communities more effectively and more efficiently, within an ever-changing and ever-challenging external environment.

Many of us, from across local government, passionately believe that improvement comes from sharing our experiences, celebrating our successes, and building on the progress that we make. To do this, there has never been a more important time to ensure that our organisations are at peak performance. That includes harmony in the workplace around a clear sense of direction and common purpose.

We cannot expect to deliver resilience and stability if we are not resilient and stable ourselves.

Organisational weakness must be eliminated, and workplace conflict can be the most undermining weakness of all. It is heartening, therefore, to see so many colleagues doing so much good work to minimise this risk, create a dynamic and constructive working environment, and promote better service delivery and local governance for our communities.

In this paper, and the accompanying suite of case studies, are the stories of those organisations who are leading the way with alternative forms of dispute resolution for improved management of conflict in the workplace. They are delivering the recommendations made by the 2007 Gibbons Review. In the last ten years, workplace mediation has gained recognition and validation at the heart of modern, enlightened, and hugely cost-effective employee relations strategies.

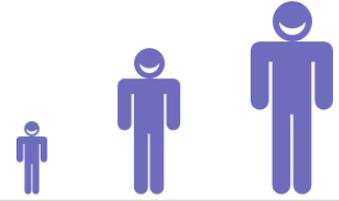
And it is this enlightened approach to employee relations that can make the difference between success and failure as we navigate the challenging environment to serve our communities at a price they can afford to pay.

How workplace conflict can jeopardise plans for the future as well as public services today...

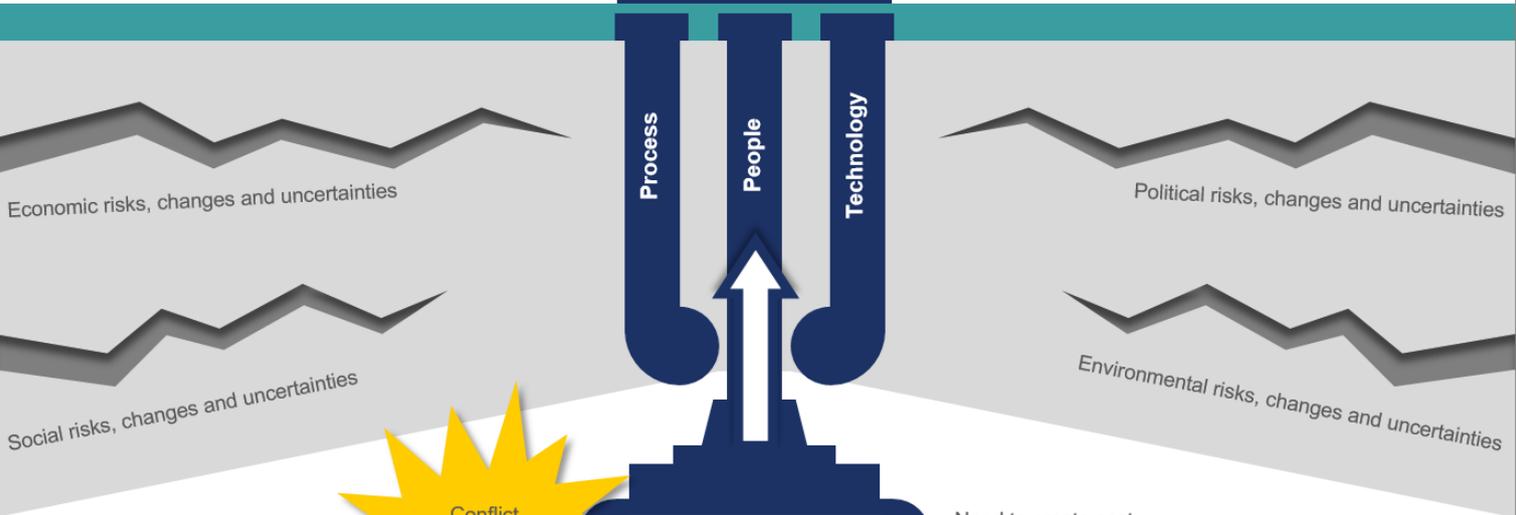
...and how public sector employers are already mitigating that risk through workplace mediation



Declining budgets and greater challenge for use of resources



Increasing demand for public services and higher performance expectations



Causes of conflict

- Personal issues
- Performance issues
- Poor communication
- Inappropriate use of power
- Perceived unfair treatment
- Lack of clarity for roles and responsibilities
- Organisational change
- Culture of blame
- Weaknesses in strategy execution, e.g. inadequate definition of vision

Potential impacts

- Consumes time and resources
- Adversely affects motivation, productivity, wellbeing and engagement
- Encourages absence and turnover
- Provokes resistance to change
- Impedes communication and erodes trust
- Damages relationships and hinders collaboration
- Generates hostility and obstructs integration
- Damages reputation and undermines public confidence
- Imposes significant direct costs, e.g. employment tribunal fees and pay outs

Conflict costs money

Conflict disrupts productivity and compromises performance

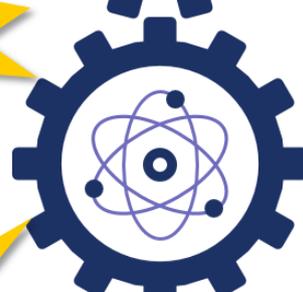
Conflict inhibits change and creates instability

Traditional procedures for dispute resolution can increase risks and intensify impacts

CONFLICT



Need to create cost savings, maximise productivity, improve performance and execute strategy whilst maintaining stability



People strategy



Employee relations



Cost savings
Increased productivity
Improved performance

MEDIATION

Drivers of mediation

- Opportunity to strengthen existing provision
- Severity of employee relations challenge
- Extent of grievance case impacts
- Growing appreciation of the impact of change
- Recognised inadequacy of traditional formal procedures

Potential benefits

- Pre-empt and resolve conflict more efficiently
- Keep potential conflict informal, in confidence and in control
- Drive ownership and autonomy around workplace issues
- Stabilise professional relationships and improve retention
- Deliver sustainable benefits for all stakeholders
- Improve workforce resilience and drive down absence
- Build trust, engagement and innovation
- Become an employer of choice

Introduction



Jennifer McNeill
Regional Director, South East Employers

This paper is a briefing for Chief Executives and Senior Managers who need to build organisational and strategic resilience in order to lead their people through intensifying risk, change and uncertainty.

Facing an increasingly volatile employee relations climate, a growing number of employers are recognising the need to review their conflict management capability and explore complementary best practice to mitigate more effectively potential risks to strategy execution as well as everyday service delivery.

We will look at the relationship between the challenges facing employers and the key considerations they are challenging themselves to address to ensure their people can deliver the critical outcomes on which strategic objectives are dependent.

We will then examine how a sample selection of public sector organisations have responded through the adoption of workplace mediation, focussing on their drivers and benefits.

More than twenty local authorities contributed to this paper, representing councils at the county, unitary, district and borough levels, as well as fire authorities. We have also welcomed input from the regional employers' organisations for the South West and East Midlands, and from individuals who have participated in mediation.

Our purpose is to celebrate progress whilst highlighting the relevance of modern conflict resolution methodologies – and the value of mediation – for the ongoing evolution of business development and service delivery.

Evolution under pressure and increasingly volatile employee relations

The situation confronting employers today

Organisations throughout the UK are striving to withstand unprecedented challenges.

Ten years have passed since the beginning of the global financial crisis. For citizens and representatives of local government, the sense of crisis has endured. They face escalating risks, changes and uncertainties – economic, political, social and environmental.

The public sector continues to feel the pressure of recession and the strict measures imposed to reduce the national deficit. Local government still struggles with unrelenting funding pressures, fierce accountability for spending public money and public reluctance to foot any more of the bill.

Despite declining budgets and greater challenge for use of resources they must also bear the strain of increased demand for public services and higher performance expectations.

At the same time, uncertainty over the withdrawal from the European Union could result in further change and instability. Any loss of local investment, reduction in migrant workers or new austerity measures will compound the current predicament.

Existing and emerging challenges are expected to intensify at an increasing pace. Local government organisations are making every effort to become fit for the future, even as they fight to remain fit for today.

Evolution under pressure

To maintain and improve service outcomes and performance whilst preserving stability and delivering financial sustainability, organisations are pushing many boundaries.

Overhauling and empowering strategy. Confronting areas of weakness and strengthening risk mitigation. Pursuing best practice and continuous improvement. Stripping away legacy policies and procedures whilst exploring new and alternative ways of working. Optimising resources and capabilities. Implementing new technology. Reimagining structures and service models and pursuing further economies of scale through third party collaboration. Minimising demand for services through investment in prevention and public resilience. Building trust through improved stakeholder engagement and demonstrable commitment to concrete values.

Understanding the need to transform fundamentally, local government leaders have sought – and are seeking still – to become more innovative, more efficient and more resilient.



Optimising and aligning the workforce to deliver strategic priorities

Employers need to create cost savings, maximise productivity, improve performance and execute strategy whilst maintaining stability.

Success cannot be achieved through **PROCESS** and **TECHNOLOGY** alone, and where services are people-facing and people-delivered, **PEOPLE** are integral to many differentiating solutions.

In associated people strategies, relevant workforce dimensions have been identified and goals defined:

Roles and relationships are being re-engineered. Expectations and requirements of employees are being redefined. Strategic narrative and performance management are being more determinedly embedded whilst human inefficiencies are being more determinedly controlled. Talent and discretionary effort are being pursued and innovation is being orchestrated.

The employment relationship and lifecycle are being wrung tightly for productivity and efficiency gains.

The transition depends on employees at all levels.

They must manage increasing workloads whilst navigating increasing ambiguity and complexity with diminishing resources. They must adapt to new ways of working whilst tolerating change, redundancy, redeployment and salary restrictions. They must cohere and collaborate effectively, building strong relationships, networks and partnerships across professional, organisational and cultural boundaries. Business-as-usual performance must be sustained whilst services are transformed.

Above all, they must respond positively and supportively.

Failure to manage employee relations can impair or derail strategy

The primary foci of people strategy relate to the transition away from the legacy organisation and the creation of strategic advantage.

However, organisations are not blind to potential opposing forces.

Change is fragile. Across all sectors and geographies, failure is understood to be an equal likelihood and failure to manage employee relations is one of the main obstacles they struggle to overcome.

In complement to developing a leaner and more capable workforce, therefore, they are building more robust risk mitigation.

The ongoing impact of the pressure on the public sector to live within its means and the scope and pace of change have amplified these risks, including areas of weakness previously perceived to be within tolerance.

Growing demands and discomfort create tension and stress for employees at all levels. As these conditions continue to show little sign of improvement, they threaten an increasingly volatile employee relations climate, increasing the risks of disengagement and conflict.



Why workplace conflict is now a greater risk

Conflict is normal in any context. Natural disagreements are inherent in the employment environment and the conditions and dynamics of modern employment and service delivery make that a more fertile landscape.

Conflict at work commonly emerges from personal and performance issues, as well as misunderstandings and challenging relationships.

However, exceptional circumstances have been introducing new, formidable dynamics.

In response to unrelenting pressure and change, employees can find it hard to adjust to new roles, new expectations, new environments, new teams and new ways of working.

Instability and discontinuity are defining the workplace. Change and churn are hindering employees from finding their feet and building secure relationships and support networks.

They may become insecure and afraid – feeling inadequate, undervalued and under threat.

They may become frustrated and angry – feeling overlooked, unsupported and disrespected.

Stress, anxiety and instinctive resistance provoke dysfunctional coping mechanisms and increase susceptibility to emotional reasoning, irrational thought and defensive behaviour. Suspicion and mistrust take root and flourish. People behave accordingly.

Many employers are at a disadvantage because of the marginalisation of the employee relations agenda and the decline of managerial standards regarding the employee relationship.

These conditions can be compounded by weaknesses in the execution of strategy. Inadequate planning and resources, disorganised leadership and abdicated responsibilities, incompatible aims and approaches, counter-productive governance and cultural obstacles – all can generate turbulence, tension, friction and rivalry.

The potential impacts of workplace conflict

Historically, workplace conflict has represented a known risk to operational performance, but for the public sector it now represents a far greater challenge.

Workplace conflict can directly and indirectly inhibit change – undermining progress, draining momentum and jeopardising benefits realisation.

It is a constant risk throughout the transformation lifecycle and beyond. If conflict is not quickly and effectively resolved, it can escalate or become embedded, increasing the potential impact severity, scope and lifespan.

- **Conflict disrupts productivity and compromises performance**

It can divert the focus and energy of employees. It can have a detrimental impact on emotional and mental wellbeing. It creates disengagement and encourages absence. It can interfere with or hijack decision-making. Escalating conflict consumes time and resources in greater quantities. It can have a massively detrimental impact on interaction with citizens.

- **Conflict inhibits change and creates instability**

Conflict can damage relationships and hinder collaboration. It impedes communication and erodes trust. It can generate hostility, polarize teams and obstruct integration. New structures, networks and programmes of activity may fail to develop or begin to break down. The reputation of the organisation may be damaged and public confidence undermined.

- **Conflict costs money**

In addition to the indirect costs of lost time and resources, lost knowledge and skills, and lost opportunities and benefits, escalating conflict can impose significant direct costs, including occupational health and counselling costs, settlement agreements and backfilling costs, employment tribunal fees and pay outs.

Regarding the latter, the average cost of defending a case at employment tribunal is approximately £9,000. The statutory cap on compensatory awards for unfair dismissal is £80,541, and in the year 2016 / 2017, the average award was £16,543. There is no cap on compensatory awards for discrimination, and in the year 2016 / 2017, the average award (for cases concerning racial, sex, disability, religious, age or sexual orientation) was £25,004.

Greater risk of employment tribunal claims

The abolition of employment tribunal fees in July 2017 has transformed the litigation risk again for employers.

With the significant financial disincentive removed, employees have more freedom and opportunity to take legal action against their employer for any issue they believe merits that level of hearing.

The introduction of the fees in 2013 prompted a significant decline in the number of tribunals. The impact of the new ruling on that trend is not yet clear, but employers throughout the UK are steeling themselves for a reversal.

For local authority employers, being able to steer conflict and potential conflict away from formal escalation is now more critical than ever.

The inadequacy of legacy mitigation

Traditionally, workplace conflict has been dealt with reactively through formal grievance policy and process.

Over the course of the last two decades, however, grievance has become widely recognised as an imperfect system. Whilst proven effective in the right circumstances, its legacy position as the only prescribed mechanism for handling workplace issues has exposed its shortcomings when applied to the greater volume of scenarios more typical today – scenarios that can be resolved more efficiently and effectively through other means.

Formalisation of conflict significantly increases the risks of lost time and litigation whilst adversely affecting the wellbeing and engagement of those involved and those around them. The disruption and cost to employers and employees can be profound.

Deference to grievance policy and process can delay or deny recognition of lower-level issues until they erupt into much bigger problems. Alternatively, grievance procedure can prematurely formalise a situation that could have been resolved informally, introducing harmful adversarial dynamics and inflating the issue out of proportion.

Either way, the impact is likely to be far more severe and the issue far harder to resolve without continued escalation. Meanwhile, the complexity and intensity of the grievance machinery can affect the psychological and physical health of all parties whilst subliminally compelling them towards employment tribunal.

Grievance proceedings are more retributive than restorative. The focus on proof, culpability and punishment drives away opportunities for meaningful resolution, reconciliation and favourable outcomes. Underlying causes are rarely acknowledged or rectified, enabling their perpetuation and the recurrence of the issue.

Where there exists an underdeveloped steer towards informal resolution, lack of skill, training and structure – often accompanied by assumptions about the inevitability of collateral damage or formal settlement – can have unintended negative consequences.

Some issues may never be exposed owing to fear of consequences and/or mistrust of the system. Instead these continue below the radar, sometimes causing deeper internal damage to the organisation.

Needs analysis for a more effective and strategic solution

To mitigate more effectively the risk and impact of workplace conflict on strategy as well as business-as-usual, local government employers are reviewing existing capability with a view to updating and improving or enhancing their approach.

Recognising the risks and limitations of over-reliance on traditional tactics, they are exploring alternative solutions that complement existing policy and procedure but may be more cost-effective and more likely to drive benefit out of conflict resolution.

They are also considering what inherent factors may stimulate, encourage or magnify the impact of conflict, and how these can be counterbalanced or neutralised.

Specifically, they aim to enable the organisation to:

- **Pre-empt and resolve conflict more efficiently**

Helping the organisation to identify and address potential issues and areas of risk before conflict can manifest or escalate. Enabling employers to respond and resolve issues quickly and carefully with minimum disruption and resource requirements.

- **Keep potential conflict informal, in confidence and in control**

Enabling a more discreet and proportionate, and less incendiary and stressful, response to workplace issues. Making conflict resolution more accessible and approachable for employees and employers. Preventing inappropriate awareness of any issues and giving employees the chance to resolve situations privately and for themselves. Reducing the number of formal cases.

- **Drive ownership and autonomy around workplace issues**

Empowering managers and employees to take responsibility for the impact and consequences of emerging issues. Contributing to line manager competence and confidence in managing their people and potential conflict.

- **Stabilise professional relationships and improve retention**

Generating meaningful and more positive engagement between affected parties. Facilitating collaborative resolution. Preserving employment and improving capacity to cooperate. Reducing the impact and likelihood of misperceptions and personality clashes.

- **Deliver sustainable benefits for all stakeholders**

Managing potential conflict towards more constructive outcomes that are mutually beneficial for employers and employees. Resolving underlying issues to increase sustainability and mitigate future risk.

- **Improve workforce resilience and drive down absence**

Promoting a healthier and more rational mindset regarding potential conflict and underlying causes. Enabling individual and organisational learning and contributing to behavioural improvements. Enhancing provision for employee wellbeing. Resolving conflict-related absence and facilitating return to work.

- **Build trust, engagement and innovation**

Enabling a more sensitive, supportive and respectful response to workplace issues. Demonstrating and promoting organisational values and enhancing understanding of workforce expectations. Improving the relationship between the organisation and the individual and encouraging employee voice.

- **Become an employer of choice**

Contributing to the development and delivery of a strong employer brand and clear and compelling employee value proposition.

Workplace mediation and drivers for adoption in local government

The challenges and requirements outlined above are not wholly unique to the public sector. In every sector, diverse organisations are exploring and experimenting with alternative conflict management methodologies.

In particular, the principles and practice of workplace mediation have received a great deal of interest and attention. Public sector bodies are among those leading a trend that has grown steadily over the last ten years and picked up greater pace in the last five.

The use of workplace mediation is gradually becoming a norm in many organisations. However, while adherence to standard models has shaped many implementations similarly, contrasting circumstances and priorities have introduced degrees of variation into the individual journeys and experiences of each organisation.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the specific drivers underpinning each implementation.

Drivers for mediation

Recognition of best practice and the benefits of a particular course of action is not always sufficient to compel an organisation down that path. In numerous cases more proximate and compelling drivers have catalysed the selection and adoption of mediation.

1

Recognised opportunity to strengthen existing provision

It has been widely acknowledged for many years that informal resolution of conflict is preferable. Consequently, it has become standard practice to highlight informal resolution as a more appropriate approach to managing issues, commonly in a brief, policy-related statement.

How did mediation gain recognition?

In 2006, the Department of Trade and Industry appointed [Michael Gibbons](#) to review employment dispute resolution in Great Britain.

In 2007, Gibbons published his [report](#), criticising the existing system and proposing a number of improvements. Among these he recommended the widespread implementation and promotion of workplace mediation, citing its established use and proven efficacy in New Zealand and the United States.

In 2009, revisions to the [Acas Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures](#) included recommendation of mediation for resolving workplace disputes.

However, this encouragement has not always been supported by any driving mechanism. Employers are becoming increasingly aware that what they have in place may not be robust enough to drive the preferred behaviour.

“Our policy needed a refresh,” says Paul Dolling, former Principal HR Officer for Rushmoor Borough Council. “It encouraged positive communication and better people management through informal resolution, but offered little practical support beyond that. In the absence of an alternative, employees could find they had only two options: do nothing or escalate issues to formal grievance.”

At the same time, there is growing awareness of the risk of mishandled attempts at informal resolution. Alice Hosker, HR Advisor at Havant Borough & East Hampshire District Councils, explains:

“When managers believe they are able to deal with a situation informally, but can’t, that represents a big risk.”

For many organisations, introducing a workplace mediation service does not represent a significant change to existing policy and practice, but rather an enhancement of what is already in place.

Historically at Maidstone and Swale Borough Councils, for example, mediation was recognised in their grievance policy and the HR Shared Services (HRSS) team supporting both councils engaged with employee issues in an informal mediative capacity. However, this inherent capability was untrained and there was no formal mediation mechanism for the councils to apply.

“The policy hasn’t changed,” the HRSS team explain. “We’ve always promoted and supported the councils with mediation. The training was about putting something formal in place behind it. We also wanted to do more to steer people away from grievance.”

2

Severity of employee relations challenge

Exceptional circumstances often provide a strong impetus for immediate and radical change.

At Surrey County Council, mediation has been embedded in the organisation as part of a broader integrated conflict management system, or ‘Restorative Framework’. It was introduced as part of a major programme of cultural transformation initiated after the council was criticised for institutional bullying.

“The blaming and bullying, the arrogance and remoteness, the associated inability for the organisation to learn,” read a public report, “have created a situation where it seems that almost everyone in the organisation could see what was wrong, but no one felt able, empowered or safe enough to articulate it.”

“This was our key driver,” explains Abid Dar, Senior Equality, Inclusion and Wellbeing Manager. “It couldn’t get any worse than that.”

The evidence confronting the council presented a clear and critical business need for a better approach.

“Significant risk and public exposure; new leadership with a powerful vision; local government creaking and straining to provide essential services; the appetite for change and the need for cultural transformation. It was a perfect storm of opportunity.”

How and why does mediation work?

An independent and impartial mediator meets each party separately, before facilitating respectful and objective dialogue between them. They explore any issues and generate positive and practical solutions for informal settlement and restoration of a functional working relationship. Their agreement and any related actions are recorded and signed, for private use only.

The confidential process, safe environment, dedicated time and simple, yet conducive structure all help to create a level and naturally compelling foundation for open, authentic and productive communication.

The mediator helps both parties to engage, listen, be receptive and challenge their own perceptions, whilst encouraging understanding, empathy and recognition of personal motivations and impact.

The neutral focus on cooperative problem-solving and agreeing fair and mutually beneficial outcomes generates positive momentum and disables traditional adversarial dynamics.

Feature contributor fact file

Surrey County Council

The Surrey solution:

- Internal integrated conflict management system, or ‘Restorative Framework’, including and built upon an internal mediation service, local Fairness Champions, Restorative Facilitators, Restorative HR and coaching network.
- Volunteer employee network trained as mediators

Number of employees in scope: 11,000

Year of implementation: from 2011

Read the [Surrey County Council case study](#)

3

Extent of grievance case impacts

In some organisations, one or two grievance cases may be all it takes to convince decision makers of the need for alternative arrangements.

At Rushmoor Borough Council, for example, the employee population totals three-hundred, almost all of whom are based in the same location. In that environment, formal grievance cases can be disproportionately disruptive.

“The indirect impact of a formal case can cause broader organisational loss than its immediate impact,” explains Paul Dolling. “They can create general disturbance and distraction. Assumptions can drive counter-productive attitudes and further decline in workplace relationships. Ultimately it can all cost time and money and undermine organisational performance. It can also undermine external reputation by making it appear an organisation does not operate in accordance with its values.”

The officers of the council understood the risk and the need to do more to contain emerging issues and prevent them escalating beyond discreet control.

“Everyone could see that mediation could help us to improve behaviour and relationships whilst also protecting against the potential damage done when formal grievance cases take hold.”

Who is mediation for? And in what situations?

Mediation can be used to address many types of workplace issue between any number of people, but is particularly effective in helping to contain, defuse and resolve conflict that emerges from interpersonal interaction between individuals in direct or indirect working relationships.

Who

Any role, any level, any relationship. For example: employee peer-to-peer; manager-employee; manager peer-to-peer; director-manager; director peer-to-peer; councillor-officer.

What

Communication issues; personality clashes; unresolved or ongoing grievance issues; perceived discrimination, harassment or bullying; differences of working style or approach; inappropriate use of power, status or position.

The use of mediation does not preclude any other form of dispute resolution or formal process.

Feature contributor fact file

Maidstone & Swale Borough Councils

The Maidstone & Swale solution:

- Existing mediative support to organisation upgraded through formal mediation training for HRSS personnel
- Incorporation of mediation principles and skills has greatly enhanced efficacy of informal approach
- Formal mediation undertaken when necessary

Number of employees in scope: 311 Swale; 498 Maidstone

Year of implementation: 2014

Read the [Maidstone & Swale Borough Councils case study](#)

4

Growing appreciation of the impact of change

In some cases, increased organisational consciousness of the charged employee relations atmosphere and accentuated risks has promoted the need for more sophisticated mitigation and coverage.

“Minor workplace conflict can arise at any point in many workplace situations,” says Mark Ridder of Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS), “and we were also experiencing unprecedented change during a time when austerity was high profile. Recognising that any single part of this could be difficult for some people to experience, conflict resolution was something we looked at quite early on in our change programme.”

“Our corporate management team have recognised that managers and staff are more stretched than ever,” says Keira Smith, Senior HR Business Partner for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, “and that in the current climate relationship issues are becoming more common. We’ve been through significant transformational change and downsized quite substantially. Grievances have increased, particularly around relationships. There’s also been an increase in settlement agreements due to unresolvable relationship issues. The cost in time and resources to manage these cases has increased as well. We needed a more cost-effective and efficient solution and the introduction of mediation has been a natural progression.”

The last ten years have also seen an increase in senior management turnover, including many chief executives.

Change at the top can have a tremendous impact in an organisation, and not always positive. It can potentially impact on organisational continuity and stability. It can also impact psychologically. Uncertainty and ambiguity are likely consequences. Feelings of vulnerability and pressure can drive extreme behaviour, causing issues to emerge and relationships to suffer.

Mediation and Trade Unions

None of the authorities consulted in this study indicated that trade union resistance to mediation had been an issue. The trade unions were described as ‘on board’ and ‘positive’, and that mediation was ‘welcomed’. Where the adoption of mediation encountered reluctance and reservations initially, the trade unions were ‘happy in the end’.

In some cases, trade union support has been considered critical to success:

“Trade union sponsorship and support has been really powerful,” says Abid Dar of Surrey County Council.

“When it comes to tackling employee issues and striving for meaningful outcomes, they are switched-on and proactive. Their energy and philosophy helped to align our foundations and lift us to a whole new level. Together, we were moving from traditional ways of working to a more positive and non-adversarial approach. We had consistent trade union buy-in and support throughout. Some of our most senior trade union colleagues have completed the training and are active members of our community.”

Feature contributor fact file

Mole Valley District Council

The Mole Valley solution:

- Mediation principles and skills incorporated into informal employee relations approach affecting day to day interactions
- HR personnel have completed mediation training
- Opportunities realised for value of mediation, therefore formal mediations undertaken when necessary

Number of employees in scope: c. 300

Year of implementation: 2015

Read the [Mole Valley District Council case study](#)

Change need not always affect the entire organisation in order to have an impact.

“Some areas always have conflict of one form or another,” says HRSS at Maidstone and Swale. “New managers with new styles of management – even that scale of change can have an impact on service delivery, morale and engagement. They’re often under pressure to remedy or improve performance and tend to be keen to set ambitious targets and objectives. They don’t expect disengagement. It can come as quite a shock. By guiding in mediation principles we’re able to help them see change from the team perspective, anticipate employee reactions and pre-empt potential conflict.”

5

Recognised inadequacy of legacy procedures

Under pressure to eliminate inefficiency and improve engagement, many employers are finding the prominent shortcomings of formal grievance procedure increasingly intolerable.

“Employee voice is strong at Warwickshire County Council,” says Allison Lehky, Workforce Strategy and Organisational Development Manager. “Employees are aware of their rights and keen to assert them - they're comfortable with challenging. Whilst it is important for employees to have opportunities to raise issues, the formal routes of a grievance can feel very confrontational which can be damaging to future relationships. They are also time consuming and do not guarantee a positive outcome, with one of the parties often feeling unsatisfied by the process. We needed another option that provided a more efficient and positive solution.”

Alice Hosker expresses a similar sentiment about the decision to implement mediation at Havant and East Hampshire Councils:

“We were experiencing employee relations issues, including a number of historical ones. In one case we followed formal process and one party chose to leave. There were other episodes of similar severity. We needed another way.”

Feature contributor fact file

Rushmoor Borough Council

The Rushmoor solution:

- External mediation service provider engaged

Number of employees in scope: 300

Year of implementation: 2016

Read the [Rushmoor Borough Council case study](#)

Feature contributor fact file

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

The Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue solution:

- Internal mediation service
- Volunteer managers trained as mediators
- External mediation service provider used when necessary and appropriate

Number of employees in scope: 550

Year of implementation: 2012

Read the [Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service case study](#)

Feature contributor fact file

Warwickshire County Council

The Warwickshire solution:

- Internal mediation service
- HR personnel trained as mediators

Number of employees in scope: 4,500

Year of implementation: 2014

At Surrey County Council, Abid Dar and his team had to overcome entrenched dissatisfaction with formal HR intervention:

"There was a reluctance to do anything about an issue in the assumption it would lead to formal grievance. Some may have believed their cases weren't strong enough, others may have been intimidated by fear of consequences. Less than half of those who did take action reported satisfaction with the outcomes. There was no access to a safe, neutral and discreet option, and people wanted to avoid becoming victims of the system. In some cases, people only reported problems after they'd resigned, because only then did they feel safe enough to come forward. We're a talent-conscious organisation, but we were losing good people for the wrong reasons."

At Mole Valley District Council, the ongoing impact of austerity and need to modernise services had prompted a growing appetite for tackling underperformance. Kate Ivackovic, Strategic HR Organisation Development Manager, recognised that heavy-handed tactics were unlikely to serve council interests in the long term:

"Formal procedure should always be the last resort, not default response. We needed to put the past behind us decisively and bring our people with us, not push them away. You can't modernise sustainably by deferring to outdated systems, it requires a more sensitive and open-minded approach. The right outcomes have to be driven in the right way."

Mole Valley is a small council with a fully integrated and close-knit HR and management team, for which Kate considers formal measures to be unsuitable:

"Formal may work for larger organisations, but it wouldn't be right for us. Cases would become contentious and polarised much earlier in their lifecycle, while opportunities to guide and coach managers would be limited. The organisation would either work around HR or the volume and cost of casework would increase."

Feature contributor fact file

Havant Borough & East Hampshire District Councils

The Havant & East Hampshire solution:

3. Internal mediation service
4. HR personnel trained as mediators
5. External mediation service provider engaged when necessary

Number of employees in scope: c. 380 staff across both councils

Year of implementation: 2015

Feature contributor fact file

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

The Blaenau Gwent solution:

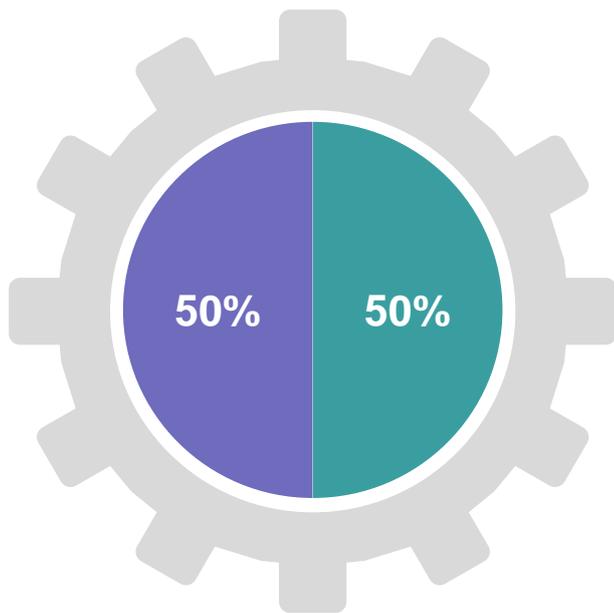
1. HR personnel trained as mediators
2. External mediation service provider engaged when necessary

Number of employees in scope: 2,912

Year of implementation: 2015

The benefits of workplace mediation

Is workplace mediation a strong and cost-effective solution? *



Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

* Survey of feature contributors

In contrast to the variation in drivers, the benefits felt and recognised across each organisation have been comparable in every case.

First and foremost, all mediation adopters agree on one fundamental advantage that mediation has over traditional formal procedure: a much stronger success rate.

There is general agreement that mediation, in whatever form deemed most appropriate for implementation, saves significant and unnecessary costs, contributes to increased productivity and helps to improve motivation and performance.

At the same time, they recognise the broader strategic value of mediation and its relevance to council objectives.

1

Pre-empt and resolve conflict more efficiently

Mediation makes it easier to identify and resolve issues in their infancy, as well as exposing issues that might otherwise have remained undetected.

“Once upon a time, an employment tribunal was to be avoided at all costs,” says Kate Ivackovic at Mole Valley. “Problems that couldn’t be sorted over a cup of tea were left alone. It’s easy to avoid employment tribunals if you never bite the bullet. Mediation can help you to unearth workforce issues and flush out emotional and contentious undercurrents.

“The more you use mediation principles, though, the less conflict you have and the less casework you get. We head a lot of potential cases off at the pass. For example, we’ve just completed a major restructure that was expected to be extremely challenging. It was a great success. Everyone is satisfied and the entire service has turned around. It could have gone very differently.”

For Mark Ridder, BFRS, the benefits of mediation outweigh the costs by a wide margin:

“The cost of internal implementation was not particularly significant. External support is more, but still immaterial compared to the cost of not doing it. Some formal grievance or tribunal cases can take months to resolve. Throughout you may have to deal with sickness absence and lost time, occupational health and counselling costs, backfilling costs and staff leaving, and all the disruption to line managers and their teams. It eats management and HR time as well, and it can all add up to a big impact on performance. Mediation can help to avoid that.”

Allison Lehky at Warwickshire has been impressed by the agility of mediation:

“It’s an extremely responsive service. Where implemented, anyone can access it, and because our HR advisors are trained mediators, they are more sensitive to potential conflict and can flag it for mediation. Generally it takes one day to resolve an issue, unlike other long and drawn out methods. It’s a much quicker intervention – short, sharp and impactful.”

Mediation has the potential to resolve situations that appear irresolvable:

“We had a long-standing issue that had been embedded in a team for about eighteen months,” says Alice Hosker at Havant and East Hampshire. “Strong personalities and relationship breakdown – the situation had become fraught and was putting strain on the whole team. One individual had been off sick for a couple of months and wasn’t comfortable coming back. There was no visible way forward – we kept going round and round in circles. We didn’t think there was any way back from that, but we tried mediation and by the end of the day we’d concluded the issue. Both parties were happy with the resolution and there have been no issues since. They’re not friends, but they can work together.”

2

Keep potential conflict informal, in confidence and in control

Making conflict resolution more accessible and approachable is resulting in fewer formal cases:

“Mediation helps us to put small low-level fires out quickly rather than allowing them to escalate over time to a place where full blown formal grievance procedures need to be initiated,” says Mark Ridder.

“Everything we’ve done has tried to answer one fundamental question,” says Abid Dar at Surrey. “Why wait? Why not bring a bad situation to somebody’s attention as soon as possible? Any delay risks greater and irreversible damage – the consequences of which can take a long time to heal, if they ever do. We estimate that up to two-thirds of all conflict is now resolved through mediation or other restorative practices. We’ve experienced significant drops in employee-led formal cases.”

Paul Dolling tells a similar story for Rushmoor:

“I have no doubt that without mediation as an option, the cases we’ve had would have become formal grievances. Instead, all parties have worked together to understand and resolve issues, finding mutual routes to mutually advantageous outcomes. It is a much more positive approach with a much more positive impact. Both participants emerge from the experience in a much more positive place.”

“Mediation is an important tool that enables us to resolve natural dissonance without losing focus and momentum or descending into less healthy conflict. Some believe alternative methodologies are toothless, but the truth is you don’t need ‘teeth’ to put things right and move on. There is greater strength in authenticity and understanding, and greater likelihood of fostering stability and respect. That’s the distinct advantage of mediation in the current climate.”

Penny James
Chief Executive
Taunton Deane Borough
and West Somerset Councils

Where in-house expertise is being developed, the rise in informal resolution is attributed to the perception, skill and confidence of those with mediation training:

“Our practitioners are more confident about tackling complex situations and more conscious of team dynamics and potential challenges,” says Abid. “They don’t limit their intervention to cases raised by employees, they take it upon themselves to intervene and resolve situations as they identify and encounter them, effectively nipping potential issues in the bud. All around the organisation we have people working in different areas, applying mediation skills in and around their day jobs.”

“Our new capability has made supporting the workforce so much easier,” says HRSS at Maidstone and Swale. “We weren’t always aware of an issue before. Even when we were aware, when is it right for HR to get involved? Do we wait to be invited? Typically we were only called in when a situation reached crisis point or the manager could no longer cope. Now the principles of mediation are ingrained in our thought processes. We can see where issues may arise and slip straight into mediation mode. We have a mechanism that enables us to step in, and feel more confident doing so. We’ve headed off a lot of issues that way.”

3 Drive ownership and autonomy around workplace issues

Proximity to mediation and participation in it is helping to encourage a new mindset and approach.

“Everyone who goes through the process has a positive view of it,” says HRSS at Maidstone and Swale. “We also incorporated our training into a new toolkit for managing change. For example, how to recognise potential conflict and develop appropriate strategies. Managers learn how to get more out of their staff and HR are brought in less often. You always get some who aren’t on board at first, but even veteran managers come round when they start having the same issues again and again.”

Blaenau Gwent is making similar progress, says Keira Smith:

“A key focus for us is that everyone should own these things, including managers and trade unions. Mediation puts a strong emphasis on participants resolving their issues for themselves. It gives them more control. Our managers are now more proactive, more creative and more willing to look at alternative ways to manage disputes. They understand there isn’t the same opportunity to do it the old way, and that traditional measures are not always the most productive and efficient.”

In some organisations informal mediation capability has begun to emerge as a people management skill. That is the aim at Mole Valley, where the HR team make every effort to provide mediation-based support without disrupting the manager-employee dynamic:

“Resolving disputes with employees is a line manager’s responsibility,” explains Kate Ivackovic. “If we take over we undermine the manager, denying them the opportunity to own the resolution. Our managers are in a completely different place – tooled up and confident about making changes. Those who hide from problems or brush them under the carpet are the exception. Our approach has enabled the benefits of mediation to permeate deep into the organisation. An increasing number of managers are applying mediation principles without intervention.”

4 Stabilise professional relationships and improve retention

Mediation is helping to ensure that relationship issues don’t derail productivity and performance or culminate in the departure of one or both parties.

For Paul Dolling, the positive impact on professional relationship capability is a key benefit:

“Mediation isn’t just about confronting or fixing an issue, it’s about becoming more aware, receptive and flexible. That kind of interaction helps managers and employees learn, be innovative and focus on reaching the best possible outcomes. They feel safer about approaching a situation and addressing underlying challenges, and help others feel safer as well. As a result, relationships are left intact – perhaps even stronger and more authentic than before. The shared contract of action and agreement generated in conclusion also provides a tangible foundation on which to rebuild a working relationship.”

For Kate Ivackovic, improved capacity to influence relationships is helping HR to fulfil their business-partner role:

“Through our proximity to the business we have the knowledge and insight to influence performance by working with our stakeholders to enhance relationships between managers and employees as well as HR and the business. We apply the process and techniques wherever we feel appropriate. We don’t announce it, just refer to our training as we consult, informally encouraging and prompting managers and employees to engage in the same dialogue mediators seek to facilitate.”

Of course, the focus is on enabling productive working relationships, not overcoming inherent personal incompatibility:

“Sometimes you can only do so much,” says HRSS at Maidstone and Swale. “Perhaps you’ve got two people who just don’t get on. You can’t make everything perfect, but you can help make an improvement.”

5 Deliver sustainable benefits for all stakeholders

Mediation is improving the outcomes of conflict resolution for employees and employers.

“Mediation is more effective than traditional methods for unearthing workforce issues and enabling positive outcomes more aligned to strategic objectives,” says Kate Ivackovic.

“Mediation provides a mechanism to explore issues and perspectives and generate solutions,” adds Allison Lehky. “It’s all about determining the most appropriate way forward, for the people involved and the council. For the right situation, mediation can be effective and powerful, especially compared with the imposed outcomes from more formal procedures. There is a much greater chance of a positive outcome for all parties.”

“Grievances can be surprisingly destructive,” says HRSS at Maidstone and Swale, “whilst mediation is far more positive – looking forward, not back. It enables happier teams and restores productivity. Conflict makes everyone uncomfortable and mediation helps them into a much better place – and it’s easier, quicker and less disruptive to service.”

As Paul Dolling explains, those who have participated in the process often emerge as enthusiastic advocates.

“We’ve been unable to avoid positive feedback. All participants have let us know how much mediation has meant to them. They’re almost effervescent about it. And it’s not just us they want to share it with, the message has been broadcast more widely.”

6 Improve workforce resilience and drive down absence

Mediation is helping to change the way organisations think and feel about potential conflict. As managers and employees become more mindful of potential conflict and more comfortable navigating potential sources of conflict, the risks reduce considerably.

“There’s less fear of dealing with an issue now, certainly,” says Paul Dolling. “In-keeping with our other efforts (crucial conversations training, for example) experiences with mediation are encouraging people to become more aware of their personal impact and manage it more appropriately. It’s a positive learning experience for the individuals involved and a positive learning experience for the organisation as a whole.”

BFRS are experiencing a similar return:

“For risk reduction alone it’s totally worth it,” says Mark Ridder, “but it isn’t just about mitigating the impact. Mediation is helping minimise conflict. Previously, issues might have been buried and gone unnoticed. Even minor problems can fester, and disengagement can create operational inefficiencies. Today, people are encouraged to raise issues, but rather than increasing, our case load has reduced significantly.”



At Surrey County Council, mediation and the other elements of the Restorative Framework are helping to drive a significant cultural shift:

“We transfer into the organisation not only the knowledge and capability, but also the attitude and philosophy. Employees are building their own expectations: to try resolving issues informally. It was the exception, now it’s the norm. Not only that, people are becoming intuitively aware of expected behaviours, and of their own behaviour and the impact it can have, which moves us closer to growing a culture where negative behaviour doesn’t even happen in the first place.”

Whilst mediation can help to prevent issues from driving employees into absence, it also provides an effective mechanism for engineering their return from that state of withdrawal and isolation. As Keira Smith explains:

“It’s helping us to reduce sickness and bring people back to work. When conflict has caused someone to avoid work – sometimes for weeks – the thought of returning causes overwhelming anxiety. Mediation is a way of re-engaging them and easing their discomfort as well as addressing and resolving the issues that drove them away in the first place.”

7

Build trust, engagement and innovation

Workplace mediation resonates strongly with the evolving cultural landscape and employee relations narrative. For many employers, the practice complements key people strategy objectives.

“We’ve got a clear organisational development strategy,” says Keira Smith, “aiming to enable staff to fulfil their roles and embrace change. The main themes are culture, engagement, relationships, wellbeing and development, and mediation can play a part in all of those. Our Corporate Leadership Team share that view.”

Typically, volunteer mediators are highly engaged:

“Our volunteers’ engagement goes through the roof,” explains Abid Dar, “because they are making a difference above and beyond the day job. They’re proud of providing that service, and they enjoy doing it.”

Not all conflict is harmful, of course. Mediation is enabling constructive criticism and innovation to emerge wherever conflict is obscuring them.

“It’s easy to forget that conflict can be good,” says HRSS at Maidstone and Swale. “Disagreement often represents different insights, knowledge and experience, but valid and beneficial messages can be camouflaged by strength of feeling. Mediation helps managers to understand where resistance is coming from and what it represents. They can tease out important messages, even if delivered with distress or discontent. Some of the best ideas can emerge that way.”

For Abid, workforce trust is not necessarily something you build but something you allow to grow.

“The only way to engage authentically is through the feedback of those who have accessed the service. Don’t push it. Introduce it gently and be patient. Let them see the value for themselves, otherwise they’ll only see corporate interference. We have hundreds of people promoting restorative practice, not just the HR department, and not just our practitioner community. They all become champions for cultural change.”

“We have worked closely with our people to define our values, clarify the behaviours we expect to see and develop an approach to resolving challenges swiftly, safely and supportively. Mediation and our Restorative Framework have been integral to this, helping us to create an authentic and values-led culture in which relationships and interactions have become more positive and productive, and become a better organisation to work for.”

Julie Fisher
Acting Chief Executive
Surrey County Council

8

Become an employer of choice

For Mark Ridder, mediation aligns extremely well to strategic goals, including being more competitive in the recruitment market.

“We want effective and productive working relationships and a culture of trust that holds us together rather than driving us apart. We want to be an employer of choice. And, of course, we want to reduce costs and case management activities whilst mitigating workplace stress. It all requires a modern approach to employee relations, and mediation exemplifies the approach we’ve taken.”

Surrey County Council is already reaping these rewards:

“Productivity is up,” says Abid Dar, “absence and turnover are down, and the shift of responsibility to the employee networks has reduced the burden on HR dramatically. It’s enhancing our employer brand as well. And it’s not as expensive as you might think.”

Plans for the future

Where mediation adopters are looking to the future, their ambitions range from renewed promotion and modest expansion to exploring new possibilities. For the latter, conflict resolution represents the tip of the iceberg.

At Surrey County Council, Abid Dar is certain of the untapped potential:

“We have always asked ourselves, ‘What more can we do?’ As the needs and nuances of the organisation have become clearer to us, we’ve been able to build and innovate – adding depth and breadth to the existing solution. We want to become more dextrous in how we use restorative practice. We see an opportunity to introduce restorative conversations into other scenarios where there is risk of conflict and grievance, like long-term absence. We also recognise its relevance beyond individual relationships: applying it to employees’ relationship with the organisation itself. Where people have lost trust with the organisation, for example, and the psychological contract has been broken.”

For many adopters of mediation, though, it is too soon to determine where to go next. Much progress has already been made and many are focussed on embedding what they have. Some have found themselves overtaken by further change or competing priorities.

There is no fear, however, that their progress will be undone. Mediation has proven itself to be an efficient and effective solution and all see it as integral to the future of employee relations in local government.

As Kate Ivackovic concludes:

“We’re not fully stabilised yet, but we’re definitely heading in the right direction. We can’t be sure what tomorrow may bring, but we’re in a much better position now to respond to whatever new challenges appear on the horizon.”



Conclusion

For all employers, the risks of destabilisation from within are just as real and powerful as those that threaten from without. Workplace conflict is expensive. It disrupts productivity and compromises performance. It inhibits change and creates instability. It is responsible for significant organisational loss.

The influence of workplace conflict can be felt in the discord between a chief executive and a senior member, the resignation of a manager who cannot see eye to eye with her director and angry demands for compensation by an employee who feels discriminated against by his peers.

The public sector is no stranger to workplace conflict, but it is becoming more a proactive strategic intervention and less a tactical afterthought. It is imperative that the impact of austerity and change on the workforce is understood and anticipated. Without adequate provision for mitigating the risk of alienation, confusion, fear and hostility, employers may find themselves taking two steps back for every step forward.

Throughout the UK, many organisations are gaining ground through the introduction of mediation practice and principles, either in the enhancement of HR and managerial capability and confidence, the establishment of an internal mediation service or by engaging an external mediation service provider. While their motivation and circumstances may vary, all are experiencing solid return on their investment – benefits aligned to the delivery of people strategy objectives.

Common challenges to the use of mediation include concerns about costs, complexity and the risk of stakeholder rejection, as well as doubt regarding its suitability for small organisations.

However, all organisations consulted in this study articulated that:

1. The costs were not at all prohibitive – especially compared to the costs of legacy solutions;
2. The implementation of mediation itself was straightforward and required little or no exceptional action;
3. Mediation has been accepted, if not welcomed, by employees, managers, senior leaders and trade unions;
4. The shape and scale of implementation can be easily adapted to suit the target environment.

Although it represents only one component in the broader suite of employee relations enablers, mediation is proving to be an extremely versatile and effective addition.

It is anticipated that the workforce of tomorrow will need to be more driven, more capable, more adaptable and more resilient, streamlined and appropriately enabled by technology, process, communication and culture. Behaviour will be ever more closely aligned to organisational values. Higher levels of employee engagement will be more conducive to successfully implementing and embedding change.

We should aspire to make that happen without breaking any eggs.

How to optimise mediation for your organisation and improve the return on investment

Every organisation featured in this study has recognised the potential of mediation for improving conflict management capability.

All have subscribed to the same model of workplace mediation and experienced similar benefits, but in design, implementation and operation each solution has been defined by unique circumstances and priorities.

Some have chosen to develop their own in-house mediation capability. Others have opted to use an external service provider. Several allow for either option.

One thing they all have in common is the need to partner with a third party specialist who can provide workplace mediation training or a workplace mediation service.

Finding the right workplace mediation partner, and getting the right advice about how best to define and meet your requirements, is essential to putting the right solution in place and realising the benefits.

For local government employers, there is a growing opportunity to source third party expertise from within the public sector. Regional Employers' Organisations are acutely aware of the challenges facing employers and the environment in which they operate, and provide strong professional advice and mediation expertise to support rising demand.

"Good examples are South West Councils and East Midlands Councils," says Jennifer McNeill. "They have contributed a wealth of knowledge and insight to this study, drawing on an unrivalled combination of expertise, experience and local knowledge. Not only in mediation, but across the broad spectrum of people management and human resources. This, combined with their total alignment to the local government agenda, makes them leading regional authorities on workplace mediation for public sector employers and the go to people for anyone taking their first or next step with workplace mediation."

About South West Councils

South West Councils (SWC) is a not-for-profit membership organisation. Their core members are the forty-one local authorities in the South West and they have 100 Associate members from across all sectors.

They provide specialist HR and Learning & Organisational Development support services and have trained mediators in the team, able to support organisations in a cost-effective way to deal with workplace conflict.

SWC also deliver Mediation and Conflict in the Workplace training in partnership with SEE, an ILM-endorsed programme, as well as bite-sized sessions on mediation to raise awareness of the benefits of the approach.

Their fifty years in operation and skilled team of experts enables SWC to add value to organisations across the region.

About East Midlands Councils

East Midlands Councils (EMC) is the consultative forum for local authorities in the East Midlands, representing their interests to Government and national organisations and providing a strong voice for the region.

EMC are a not-for-profit organisation that exists to help organisations deliver better outcomes with and for local people. They enable councils to work together on key issues of common concern and help them develop their workforce and leadership and improve their services.

Forty-five of the region's local authorities are EMC members. Their governance is provided by an Executive Board of councillors from across the region.

EMC have a proven track record in effective learning and development interventions, including successful CPD programmes for environmental health, planning and housing officers, and skills-based programmes and conferences linked to learning and development objectives for individual authorities.

Authorities in the East Midlands are increasingly using mediation to resolve conflict and the EMC external mediation service can provide this support for them.

About South East Employers

South East Employers (SEE) is an independent and not-for-profit centre of excellence, advising and supporting employers. They are a leading provider of high quality consultancy and learning in areas of organisational change, leadership, compliance with employment law, governance and local democracy. As a central 'hub', they are a forum for networks, partnerships and shared learning. They aim to add value through their wealth of local knowledge, experience and professional expertise regarding the challenges and opportunities facing organisations today and tomorrow.

Since 2010 SEE have trained over 270 mediators and delivered over 60 successful mediations for a range of employers. They are regularly called upon to deliver mediation training and complex mediations in other regions.

The SEE mediation programme is designed and delivered to take account of real and increasingly complex workplace situations. It develops confident and mediation-ready mediators who can gain an ILM certificate on successful completion of the course and assignments.

“I'd trained with SEE before and knew they were good. They have strong public sector contacts, local government expertise and a good relationship with our county council where they were helping to deliver mediation training. It gave me confidence and helped validate my thinking. We didn't just learn how to run a mediation, we learned how to think, communicate and facilitate objectively in order to preserve the integrity of the process.

Kate Ivackovic
Strategic HR Organisation Development Manager
Mole Valley District Council

“SEE have supported our efforts at every stage, providing training and ongoing development support for the entire network. As well as being experienced mediation practitioners they have a strong and versatile training capability, which has enabled the creation of our Mediator, Fairness Champion and Restorative Facilitator networks, and the flexibility and depth of understanding to help us create and deliver the right, complementary solutions to meet our needs.

Abid Dar
Senior Equality, Inclusion and Wellbeing Manager
Surrey County Council



