

The Benefits of Informal Mediation

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Mediation - a confidential process in which a neutral third party assists others in the resolution of a dispute/**Mediator** - the neutral third party

Ombudsman - a neutral and impartial person within an organization who may provide informal and confidential assistance to employees at all levels in resolving work-related conflicts and concerns; may serve as a counsellor, informal go-between, facilitator, formal mediator, informal fact-finder, upward feedback mechanism, consultant, problem solver, and problem preventer; whose office is located outside the ordinary line management structures.

The Challenge - take care of the problem as early as possible!

It is usually the case, that people will struggle with a dispute or disagreement until it escalates to the point where resolution is not likely and relationships have been damaged. At this point the dispute often ends up in formal channels before an authority - judge, supervisor, arbitrator, investigator - where a resolution is imposed. This **formal process** takes a great deal of time and money and the resolution may not truly address the underlying issues that fuel the dispute.

Conflict is a natural part of the human experience and is present no less in the workplace than anywhere else. Studies show that the earlier a dispute is addressed the better are the chances that it will be resolved. If the parties to the dispute participate in the solution the chance the outcome will be successful are significantly higher than if the solution were imposed by an outside source - e.g. arbitrator, judge, supervisor.

Organizations that use an **ombudsman** - in my view a specialized role for a mediator - show savings to the organization that far exceed the cost of the ombudsman's office. The ratio of cost to savings runs between 1:2 to 1:6 and are realized in decreased turnover/retention of valuable personnel, fewer formal complaints (EEO, ADA, wrongful termination, etc.), decreased litigation, improved productivity at all levels. The internal mediator can handle cases that may take an inordinate amount of time away from a manager's usual duties

An informal process of dispute resolution - be it a mediation session, shuttle diplomacy, or an ombudsman's intervention is designed to incorporate all issues in the dispute - especially those that may not come under any rule of law but are nonetheless the driving force behind the ongoing conflict. The parties' participation in a dispute resolution process facilitated by a skilled neutral can resolve the dispute, save money, improve working relationships and make it less likely that the problem will reoccur.