

RESOLVING WORKPLACE CONFLICT WITH CONFIDENCE



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
MEDIATION
&
CONSTRUCTIVE WORKPLACE
RELATIONSHIPS

DEDE GOLD

WWW.DEDEGOLDRESOLUTION.COM

INTRODUCTION

Workplace conflict is a reality wherever people are working together. Different perspectives, pressures, personalities, and priorities are inevitable — particularly in environments that are fast-moving or demanding.

What matters most is not whether conflict arises, but how it is handled when it does.

Too often, workplace issues are avoided for too long, or escalated too quickly into formal processes that entrench positions and do long-term relationship damage. By the time this happens, trust is often already eroded and resolution feels much harder than it needed to be.

Mediation offers a different way forward. It provides a valuable space for facilitated conversations to take place before conflict becomes corrosive, or costly. This guide is intended as a practical starting point for organisations, managers, and individuals who want to approach workplace conflict in a more constructive way.

In the pages that follow, I will outline why workplace conflict escalates, when mediation can be most effective, and practical principles that help individuals and organisations progress with clarity and confidence.

Handled well, workplace conflict does not have to define an organisation negatively. In fact in many cases, it can become an opportunity for evolution, learning, and stronger working relationships going forward.

The research reflects that over 80% of workplace disputes are successfully resolved through mediation. I ask you to consider how much is to be gained from a good supported private conversation, and how little there is to lose by exploring this as a first option.

Wishing you well in your workplace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pete".

A certain level of conflict is not unhealthy.

We all have our own sets of values, beliefs and interests and **we won't always see eye to eye.**

What matters is how conflict is approached once it arises. Sometimes we need support in moving forwards...



APPROACHING WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Workplace conflict rarely begins with bad intent. Most people come to work wanting to do their job well, to be respected, and to contribute meaningfully. Yet differences in communication styles, expectations, pressure, and perspective can easily give rise to tension — particularly in demanding or fast-moving environments.

Every company and organisation will have its unique brilliance — and its unique issues too. A certain level of disagreement at work is natural. Indeed it can even be healthy. ‘Constructive controversy’ can drive change and spark new ideas and engender growth — but when dysfunctional conflict arises it needs to be managed with care.

Workplace conflict often carries layers of power imbalance, fear of consequences, or concern about reputation and job security. People can feel defensive, unheard, or reluctant to speak openly.

In these circumstances, it is understandable that positions harden and communication breaks down.

However — even where relationships feel strained, or trust has been eroded, there is still much that can be done to steer a better course.

Approaching workplace conflict constructively ideally involves:

- Consciously addressing matters before they escalate, particularly into formal grievance or disciplinary processes
- Creating the right conditions for dialogue, so that people feel safe enough to speak honestly
- Choosing proportionate, early intervention, rather than waiting until positions are entrenched
- Engaging the right support, at the right time, to guide the difficult conversations that can get people ‘to the other side’.

I use the word ‘consciously’ because a sensible call has to be made. Collateral damage can be incurred when workplace disputes are either avoided for too long or escalated too quickly. Both carry risks. Avoidance can allow resentment to grow beneath the surface, while premature formalisation can entrench positions and damage working relationships beyond repair.

Mediation offers an alternative path. It provides a structured, confidential forum in which an adult-to-adult dialogue can take place, supported by a neutral professional third party who will have the interests of all parties to the fore.

Used early and appropriately, it can prevent conflict from becoming corrosive, and costly— and can preserve working relationships that might otherwise be lost.

Workplace mediation is powerful. Parties in dispute can come together to speak openly and constructively in a confidential, supported space, expressing differing points of view and finding effective ways to resolve issues causing difficulty between them.



COMMON WORKPLACE CONFLICT SCENARIOS

Workplace conflict of course takes many and varied forms, but while the circumstances will differ, the underlying dynamics are often familiar.

The following scenarios reflect the kinds of situations where mediation can be particularly helpful.

Manager–Employee Tension: Conflict between a manager and an employee often develops gradually. It may begin with concerns about performance, communication style, or expectations, but can quickly become personalised on both sides.

Managers may feel challenged, undermined, or frustrated by what they perceive as resistance.

Employees, meanwhile, may feel criticised, unsupported, or unfairly treated. Where communication breaks down, assumptions are easily made and trust can erode.

Mediation can provide a structured space to explore expectations, clarify misunderstandings, and rebuild a workable professional relationship — particularly where both parties need to continue working together.

Breakdowns Within Teams: Team conflict often arises where roles are unclear, workloads uneven, or pressures high. Differences in working styles, personalities, or communication preferences can become magnified under stress.

Over time, this can lead to division within teams, informal alliances, or resentment that undermines collaboration and morale. Left unaddressed, even relatively small issues can begin to affect productivity and wellbeing — both of the parties involved and colleagues working with them.

Early mediation can help teams reset their expectations, improve communication, and restore a sense of shared purpose — before divisions become entrenched.

Communication Disconnects and Relationship

Difficulties: Not all workplace conflict stems from overt disagreement. Some of the most challenging situations involve persistent communication difficulties, perceived disrespect, or a sense of being excluded or marginalised.

These issues can be particularly hard to articulate, yet their impact can be significant. Individuals can feel anxious, demotivated, or reluctant to raise concerns through formal channels.

Mediation can improve matters significantly here. It offers a confidential conversation in which these experiences can be expressed and addressed constructively, with support to improve understanding and reset the working relationship.

Personality Clashes: Personality differences are a natural part of working life. Difficulties arise when those differences are interpreted negatively, or when people feel their approach or values are being dismissed.

Personality-based conflict often becomes cyclical, with each interaction reinforcing existing assumptions. Without intervention, this can lead to avoidance, frustration, or going straight to a formal complaint.

Mediation can help individuals make progress in working together — gathering understanding behind the perceived dynamics and explore how different styles can co-exist more effectively within a professional setting.

Return-to-Work or Change-Related Conflict:

Periods of change — such as restructures, role changes, or return to work following absence — can heighten vulnerability and tension. Expectations may be unclear, and individuals may feel uncertain about their position or role within the organisation. Communication is so important here.

Misunderstandings at these junctures can quickly escalate if not handled sensitively. Mediation can support open dialogue, clarify expectations, and help re-establish trust at critical transition points.

The above are illustrative — not exhaustive — but such scenarios are often left to run not because the issue is unmanageable, but because it is difficult to name. Concerns may be minimised, avoided, or allowed to drift in the hope that they will resolve themselves. Over time however, unresolved issues often resurface in more problematic forms, making resolution harder and more costly — both emotionally and organisationally.

Recognising when to consider, reflect, and intervene early can make a substantial difference towards a positive workplace experience for employees, and ultimately better outcomes for all.

HOW MEDIATION WORKS IN PRACTICE

What a Mediator Does

A workplace mediator provides a structured, confidential space where people can speak openly and be heard. The role of the mediator is to support a respectful conversation, help reduce tension, and guide the discussion towards understanding and practical progress.

A mediator will:

- Create a safe, neutral environment for honest conversation
- Support respectful communication, especially when emotions are high
- Help clarify what the real issues are, not just the surface-level disagreement
- Encourage listening and understanding, without judgement or pressure
- Help identify needs, concerns, and priorities on all sides

- Support people to explore options and agree realistic next steps
- Keep the process focused and constructive, so it doesn't become circular or unhelpful

Mediation is not about fixing people — it is about supporting better conversations, restoring workable communication, and helping individuals and teams move forward in a progressive way.

What a Mediator Does Not Do

Mediation isn't about establishing who is right or wrong. It isn't about forcing agreement or compromise. And it isn't about winning or losing. It is about creating the conditions for clarity, understanding, and workable progress.

A mediator does not:

- Take sides or act as an advocate for one person over another

- Make decisions or determine fault
- Investigate allegations or gather evidence
- Provide legal advice
- Force an agreement or pressure people to “make up”
- Replace formal workplace procedures where they are needed

A mediator will enable people to have the conversations they have been avoiding — with the right structure and support — and to ideally forge a workable resolution that feels fair, realistic, and sustainable.

Situations Where Mediation May Not Be Suitable

While workplace mediation can be highly effective, it is not appropriate in all circumstances. Recognising when mediation is — and is not — suitable is an important part of handling workplace conflict responsibly.

Mediation **works best** where:

- participants are willing to engage in good faith
- there is sufficient balance for dialogue to take place safely
- the focus is on resolving issues rather than determining fault

Mediation **may not be the right forum** where:

- there are allegations of serious misconduct
- safeguarding concerns are present
- criminal behaviour is alleged
- there are significant power imbalances that cannot be addressed safely
- a formal investigation is required to establish facts

In these cases, organisations may need to follow formal procedures first — and mediation may become appropriate later, once those processes are complete.

Why the Mediator's Role Matters

Conflict often persists not because resolution is impossible, but because communication has broken down. Emotions, assumptions, and fears can prevent people from listening — or from feeling safe enough to speak honestly between themselves.

The mediator's role is to hold the process, allowing participants to engage with one another in a more thoughtful and structured way. This can significantly alter those feelings of risk and exposure, the quality of conversation and, in turn, the likelihood of a constructive outcome being achieved.

‘Handled well, mediation does not diminish authority or accountability. Instead, it can strengthen working relationships and restore clarity where it has been lost.’

It really can be a *golden opportunity* for a transformative experience — both for individuals and teams - to rebuild trust and progress.



“We listen - we hear - we express - we evolve”

Mediation and Formal Processes

It is important to note that mediation does not necessarily sit in opposition to formal workplace processes. In some circumstances, mediation may be appropriate:

- alongside other processes
- after a formal process has concluded
- to support the restoration of working relationships

Mediation is designed as a structured process, but is flexible in its nature. A good facilitated dialogue at any stage can break impasse and create routes to resolution that can seem unfeasible at the start of a dispute.

Where there is a choice between forums, bear in mind how efficient — time wise and costs wise — mediation is and how productive it can really be.

It takes place perhaps over a day, not the weeks or months that formal proceedings may span, with all the collateral impact that stressful time brings.

Even if an employee ‘wins’ under adjudication by a third party, they might not necessarily get what they really need. They may have required a good job reference, a chance to be understood, or even just an apology. Any chance for improved dynamics are lost and the impact on future careers and reputation can be detrimental.

These are delicate matters that go beyond the black and white of a cut and dried grievance policy.

What matters most is choosing the right approach at the right time given the circumstances of each situation, with a clear understanding of purpose for the road ahead.

While no two situations will be the same, certain principles consistently support better management of interpersonal conflict in the workplace.

The following 7 suggestions are shared with you as foundations for finding resolution in the most productive way...



7 PRINCIPLES TO POSITIVE RESOLUTION

A Soft Intervention Before Positions Harden

Thoughtful, Proportionate Response

Choose the Right Forum at the Right Time

Treat Conflict as a ‘Shared Problem’

Seek Understanding Before Solutions

Preserve Working Relationships Where Possible

Move Forward with Clarity and Confidence

1

A Soft Intervention Before Positions Harden

Tension or conflict already present escalates when concerns are left unaddressed or are raised only after frustration has built up. Creating space early for communication — before positions become fixed — can prevent issues becoming crises, and harder to resolve.

Where companies take a human-centred approach — removing barriers to open dialogue and informal redress, it can work so much better for all.

See what can be done early — full-on fallouts and formal proceedings can frequently be avoided with a little considered care

2

Thoughtful, Proportionate Response

Approaching workplace conflict with confidence does not mean applying the same solution to every situation. It means responding with thought, proportionality, and with care for both people and process.

Where appropriate - a good quality conversation can change everything. Understanding when mediation is appropriate (and of course when it is not) helps organisations to act with integrity, protect individuals, and support a better working culture for all.

Badly handled conflict harms both individuals, and organisations. You want to be the employer that runs the business with a considered conflict resolution culture — harmony in the workplace will reward you in spades.

3

Choose the Right Forum at the Right Time

Of course formal workplace processes have an important role, but they are not always the best starting point — particularly when the aim is to preserve working relationships long term.

Do remember different processes can work in tandem — neither need be standalone. Mediation as a first port of call is conducted ‘without prejudice’ meaning that if a satisfactory outcome isn’t reached — and the matter goes to formal process — the content of the mediation cannot be discussed. The parties will be in no worse a situation for having tried.

Formal proceedings may absolutely be necessary — but they can come with costly consequences for the company and for the parties involved.

4

Treat Conflict as a Shared Problem

If those involved can begin to view the issue as a shared problem to be resolved, the entire trajectory of a workplace dispute can change.

When this shift is possible, it opens the door to dialogue, understanding, and more constructive outcomes. We listen — we hear — we express — we evolve...

In reality of course this will not always be straightforward — but reframing tensions or conflict as a shared issue to be worked through, rather than a personal failing, can shift the whole tone of engagement.

Collaborative energy reduces defensiveness and encourages investment in a common goal to find a way forward that works for everyone.

5

Seek Understanding Before Solutions

Rushing to resolve conflict without first understanding what truly matters to those involved can lead to superficial or short-lived outcomes.

Taking time to listen and clarify perspectives is often the turning point. The most impactful shifts happen in mediation when I ask each of the parties to ‘help me understand’.

Hearing perspectives shared in that space can switch the whole dynamic of disputes. Whether subtle shifts in understanding or lightbulb realisations — these conversations can pave the most positive path possible ahead.

6

Preserve Working Relationships Where Possible

In most workplaces, people need to continue working together long after a dispute has been addressed. How conflict is addressed and handled can have a lasting impact on trust and morale

The traditional routes to formal dispute resolution tend to perpetuate polarisation and do lasting damage to relationships. What is needed is an opportunity to repair and restore, and sometimes just hearing an apology is all that is really craved.

Adopting a compassionate and collaborative approach promotes wellbeing, productivity, and engagement. Where a team feels connected, motivated and supported, businesses thrive.

7

Move Forward with Clarity and Confidence

Resolution through mediation is not about winning or losing. It allows relationships to be restored — even strengthened — or where needed, ended with dignity. Where successful, it yields a clear, workable resolution. Negotiated outcomes tend to be more sustainable because they are shaped by the people involved.

This powerful process enables people to move forwards. It requires people to ‘show up’ — to be open, and sometimes brave. But it will reward them for doing so. It is not about who is right or wrong — the focus is on understanding, recalibrating, and solving the issues so they don’t create conflict again.

HOW I CAN HELP

If you would like support in applying these principles to your own organisation — calmly, strategically, and with care — I can help. I work with HR teams, organisations, managers, and individuals to support the early, constructive resolution of workplace tensions and conflict.

My support can include:

- workplace mediation
- support for managers navigating difficult conversations
- working alongside HR teams to reduce escalation and fallout
- post-process mediation to help restore working relationships

I am a CMC and IMI accredited mediator with a background in law. I help people to have the difficult conversations that can help them move forward — preserving and strengthening working relationships wherever that is possible. And it is so often possible.

DEDE GOLD



I am Dede Gold, a dual-qualified solicitor (Ireland, England & Wales), now practising as a Mediator supporting people through conflict — both personal and professional. With a background in litigation I truly believe that in the majority of cases there is a better way through when an informed and considered approach can be taken early on.

I want people and businesses to be able to work and thrive - embracing the life and opportunities around them, avoiding unnecessary harm and costs where possible. And to reiterate - it is so often possible.

Please feel free to contact me — I'm always happy to talk things through.

CONTACT



Irl: 083 475 6778

UK: 07939 006 339

dede@dedegoldresolution.com

WWW.DEDEGOLDRESOLUTION.COM

