

Mediation: The Results Are In

At TCM, we hear about the benefits of mediation every day. The organisations and individuals who have been through it are eager to tell us: it works. But the more we can learn about how and why mediation works, the better.

Which is why we were so pleased to hear that the conciliation and arbitration service ACAS was carrying out a study into the effects of workplace mediation at the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

TCM developed and supported the integration of a unique and holistic conflict management system at the Trust. TCM trained all the mediators and conflict coaches involved as well as providing ongoing support, assistance and professional development for the mediation programme and associated stakeholders across the Trust. We have been exceptionally pleased with how the system has been working but we were very keen to see the conclusions of such a highly respected report.



The ACAS report is an important one, not just for the Trust or for TCM. It is one of the most thorough examinations of mediation seen in this country. And it is very positive indeed.

Put simply, it finds that the success of mediation was very high, with 90% of mediations resulting in an agreement. It found that most of those who had been through the experience felt that their situation had improved as a result and over 75% would recommend mediation to a friend.

This is fantastic news and in line with our experiences here and at other organisations we have worked with.

Under the previous grievance system it was felt that personality clashes and performance management issues were the cause of most of the conflict in the organisation. Although wasted staff and management time were the most obvious

costs, there was also evidence that conflict was having an impact on performance and even patient care.

In other words, under the previous system no one was winning and a lot of people were losing. By fundamentally shifting the focus to early conflict resolution, TCM has helped the trust turn those problems around.

As one participant in mediation put it:

“I felt a lot better solving my issues this way rather than hoping they would solve themselves. I went in nervous, unsure and came out calm, confident and happy with the results. I felt my issues were solved and it was a great relief for me to be able to talk about these issues and not be judged.”

This kind of testimony, along with the mediation success rates reflected in the report, are a valuable affirmation of the work we are doing at TCM. But perhaps even more heartening than the individual cases is a recognition that the workplace culture itself has changed at the Trust as a result of the mediation system.

The report authors found an acceptance within the organisation that conflict is inextricably linked to employee engagement as well as an acceptance that conflict management is a key managerial competence. This kind of shift is what is needed to really lock in change. It is all about learning to live with conflict.

As the report concluded, “This case study provides a unique example of an organisation that has adopted a strategic and systematic approach to conflict management. Furthermore, there is persuasive evidence that this has led to the development of a culture in which early resolution and a collaborative approach to conflict is embedded.”

What that means in practice is simply put by one of the managers who talked to the report authors:

“I was probably more a person that would reach for the policies and procedures and wait necessarily until someone wanted to make it a formal process, not anymore... I’d spend twenty minutes with someone who’s upset or whatever but it doesn’t matter, it nips it in the bud, the person has been listened to and we discuss what

their options are and what they want to do and what we're going to do going forward."

That is exactly what we are all working towards. Not just a new process and new procedures for their own sake, but a shift towards a fundamentally new approach to conflict management. An acceptance that conflict is part of life and a determination to deal with it positively and early on.

Mediation is never an easy option. It is difficult for those who go through it. It can be difficult for those organisations willing to go through the upheaval of introducing it. But both on the individual and organisational levels, we can see very clearly that the effort is most definitely worth it.

It is great to see that our passion for mediation is now being matched by hard evidence of the impact of this approach.

About David Liddle

David's greatest passion is mediation and his greatest strength is people. He has over 20 years experience of mediating in some of the most complex disputes imaginable. He set up and runs The TCM Group. With over 15 full time employees and with 20 expert consultants, TCM are the UK's leading provider of mediation and conflict management services, training and consultancy.

David has worked with over 4000 organisations to help them to embed a culture of resolution. He trains mediators and works with HR professionals and business leaders to create a culture and an environment which embraces mediation and promotes dialogue.