

What is the difference between mediation and facilitation?

Definitions of mediation and facilitation differ greatly.

Mediation

Mediation usually occurs in order to resolve a dispute. A neutral person, the mediator, is brought in to assist because the parties have been unable or unwilling to resolve their dispute on their own.

Generally, the process is one of robust negotiation.

The objective in mediation is usually to achieve a binding and enforceable agreement settling all matters in dispute.

Once that agreement has been reached, the dispute is over.

Often the parties are not in an ongoing close relationship, or expect to have to engage with one another in the future.

Facilitation

Facilitation usually involves parties who are not so much in dispute as in a state of potential dispute.

They wish to engage in dialogue in order to achieve harmony of viewpoint.

Often there is tension between their viewpoints.

Sometimes there are interpersonal or other relationship difficulties.

The role of the facilitator is to ensure as best as possible that the discussions between the parties are as constructive as possible.

The objective of the discussions is directed towards achieving better understandings in order to make sense of what has occurred, avoid future disputes or to path the way for future detailed agreement.

Similarities

Mediators and facilitators apply many common skills.

Often facilitators are trained mediators.

Sometimes processes fall midway between what may be called facilitation and what may be called mediation.

Sometimes what is called mediation is really facilitation, and what is called facilitation is really mediation.

	Facilitated Discussion	Workplace Mediation
Purpose	Wide-ranging e.g. to agree purpose or strategy for a team, to resolve conflict, to formulate an action plan, to decide whether and how to implement change etc.	To resolve conflict between colleagues and/ or to improve their working relationship
Participation	May not be voluntary	Is voluntary
Structure	Often loose and very informal, but can be more structured.	Structured process
Confidential	Sometimes	Always (within stated limits)
The 3rd party's training	May be trained in mediation or facilitation	Trained in mediation, preferably registered or accredited
The 3rd party	Impartial, may be external or internal, their role is to help participants create agreements.	