

Workplace Conciliator / Facilitator – What is it you actually do?

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Abstract

In 2011 in response to a range of concerns about organisational culture and workplace behaviour, the then Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) undertook a project looking internationally at programs that champion early intervention, promote ADR and provide staff with a safe and independent place to go to when they have a workplace concern. Following the committee recommendation DSE adopted the model of the Organisational Ombudsman, and in December 2011 the Office of the Workplace Conciliator (OWC) opened for business, practising under the principles of the International Ombudsman's Association - confidentiality, independence, informality and neutrality.

Information about the establishment of the OWC was presented to the Senior Public Service including WorkSafe Victoria.

WorkSafe adapted the DSE model and created the Internal Workplace Mediator role (later rebadged as Internal Facilitator) as an independent consultancy operating within a dedicated office in WorkSafe. The IF consultancy opened for a 12 month trial in August 2013. In establishing the IF office, WorkSafe highlighted that while part of the driver was to support employees, the role was also 'a way to demonstrate an holistic leading practice approach to conflict resolution in the Victorian community that includes an equally strong focus on early action and intervention'.

What are these roles? How do they operate and why are they needed in an environment that seems to have a number of options to allow staff to raise issues and have disputes resolved?

These innovative roles address the gap between individual counselling/mentoring/coaching on the one hand, and an organisational development approach to dispute resolution as the alternative model. Programs such as EAP are focused on the person. HR is generally focused on the organisation. The Conciliator / Facilitator positions play an integral role in developing best practice of integrated conflict management in organisational settings. They are focused on the person within the organisation.

The development of an Integrated Conflict Management System (ICMS) which provides both a diversity of access points and a diversity of options for addressing conflict, is supported by contemporary international literature on conflict resolution in the workplace, as well as by the State Services Authority of the Victorian Public Service. Multiple options provide avenues for surfacing issues that destroy morale and reduce productivity. Effective triaging can promote pathways to early resolution.

The DEPI Workplace Conciliator and WorkSafe Internal Facilitator roles share fundamental operating principles. Each, however, is tailored to their respective sites and clientele. In

exploring the transferability of the model, the presentation will highlight the substantial gaps that exist in formal workplace dispute resolution systems which innovative early ADR approaches such as these, are able to fill.