

~ Definition of Mediation ~

Mediation is the attempt to help parties in a disagreement to hear one another, to minimize the harm that can come from disagreement (e.g. hostility or 'demonizing' of the other parties) to maximize any area of agreement, and to find a way of preventing the areas of disagreement from interfering with the process of seeking a compromise or mutually agreed outcome.

Mediation, as used in law, is a form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR), a way of resolving disputes between two or more parties with concrete effects. Typically, a third party, the mediator assists the parties to negotiate a settlement. Disputants may mediate disputes in a variety of domains, such as commercial, legal, diplomatic, workplace, community and family matters.

The term "mediation" broadly refers to any instance in which a third party helps others reach agreement. More specifically, mediation has a structure, timetable and dynamics that "ordinary" negotiation lacks. The process is private and confidential, possibly enforced by law.

Participation is typically voluntary. The mediator acts as a neutral third party and facilitates rather than directs the process.

Mediators use various techniques to open, or improve, dialogue and empathy between disputants, aiming to help the parties reach an agreement. Much depends on the mediator's skill and training. As the practice gained popularity, training programs, certifications and licensing followed, producing trained, professional mediators committed to the discipline.

The benefits of mediation include:

Cost

While a mediator may charge a fee comparable to that of an attorney, the mediation process generally takes much less time than moving a case through standard legal channels. While a case in the hands of a lawyer or a court may take months or years to resolve, mediation usually achieves a resolution in a matter of hours. Taking less time means expending less money on hourly fees and costs.

Confidentiality

While court hearings are public, mediation remains strictly confidential. No one but the parties to the dispute and the mediator or mediators know what happened. Confidentiality in mediation has such importance that in most cases the legal system cannot force a mediator to testify in court as to the content or progress of mediation. Many mediators destroy their notes taken during a mediation once that mediation has finished. The only exceptions to such strict confidentiality usually involve child abuse or actual or threatened criminal acts.

Control

Mediation increases the control the parties have over the resolution. In a court case, the parties obtain a resolution, but control resides with the judge or jury. Often, a judge or jury cannot legally provide solutions that emerge in mediation. Thus, mediation is more likely to produce a result that is mutually agreeable for the parties.

Compliance

Because the result is attained by the parties working together and is mutually agreeable, compliance with the mediated agreement is usually high. This further reduces costs, because the parties do not have to employ an attorney to force compliance with the agreement. The mediated agreement is, however, fully enforceable in a court of law.

Mutuality

Parties to a mediation are typically ready to work mutually toward a resolution. In most circumstances the mere fact that parties are willing to mediate means that they are ready to "move" their position. The parties thus are more amenable to understanding the other party's side and work on underlying issues to the dispute. This has the added benefit of often preserving the relationship the parties had before the dispute.

Support

Mediators are trained in working with difficult situations. The mediator acts as a neutral facilitator and guides the parties through the process. The mediator helps the parties think "outside of the box" for possible solutions to the dispute, broadening the range of possible solutions.

Mediation, *Wikipedia*. Retrieved October 24, 2015, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediation>