

PRO VISION BACKGROUND PAPER

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Introduction

Our presentation assumes that people attending our workshop understand the theory and the benefits of professional support.

This paper provides background material to our workshop. It covers what we mean by professional support and discusses the spectrum of professional support. It identifies the needs of ADR practitioners (mediators) and how those needs may be met.

It looks at the skills that mediators have in their practice and how those skills can be applied to providing professional support. The paper discusses the techniques and structure of professional support and the relationship between the professional support provider and the practitioner.

Finally, we discuss what can be done to encourage the development of a network for those providing professional support.

Definition of terms

Professional support

We believe there is a spectrum of interventions which constitute professional support. The word "supervision" meets with some resistance and can mean different things to different people. There is often a connotation of interference or oversight and a suggestion that this will inhibit the independence of the mediator. We believe there is a place for supervision within our spectrum.

Mediator

For the purposes of this workshop we use the term mediator to cover those who practise alternative dispute resolution processes.

Purpose of professional support

The purpose of professional support is to ensure those using mediation services receive the highest quality of service. For that to occur, mediators must feel supported to carry out their practice professionally. What a mediator brings to mediation is themselves and their skills. It is therefore important that they are fully functional and committed to continuous improvement in achieving better results for their parties.

The spectrum

The workshop will explore in greater detail the full spectrum ranging from self reflection (at the least formal end) through mentoring and coaching to long-term formal supervision.

The focus of supervision

The focus of supervision as set out by Hawkins and Shohet¹ is:

- (1) To provide a regular time and space for mediators to reflect upon the content and the process of their work.
- (2) To develop a mediator's understanding and skills.
- (3) To receive information and another's perspective concerning one's work.
- (4) To receive feedback – content and process.
- (5) To be validated and supported both as a person and a mediator.
- (6) To ensure that as a person and a mediator one is not left to carry unnecessary difficulties, problems and projections alone.
- (7) To have space to explore and express personal distress, transference or counter- transference that may be brought up by our work.
- (8) To plan and utilise personal and professional resources better.
- (9) To be pro-active rather than reactive.
- (10) To ensure quality of work.

Professional support providers

Mediation is a relatively new profession. It can be difficult to find people who have the experience and attributes to provide professional support.

The focus of our paper is to encourage experienced mediators to develop their skills so they can provide professional support to their colleagues.

Needs of the mediator

The needs of the mediator can be categorised into two main areas:

Professional, Personal and Psychological Safety

These needs include:

- (1) Debriefing so that issues of concern may be raised and dealt with and not linger,
- (2) Dealing with deep seated psychological and emotional issues – something within a mediation may have brought back memories of a similar event for the mediator. Being reassured and validated,
- (3) Receiving confirmation so that confidence levels can be kept up.

¹ Hawkins and Shohet, *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, second edition 2000, p. 52

The type of support required does not necessarily have to be provided by a mediator

Skills Enhancement and Development

These needs, and the combination of them, may differ according to the stage of the mediator's career. If the aim is for high quality services for the parties, the need is ongoing. Mediators often need to be challenged to consider habitual practice that may be non productive and to try innovations in practice.

Each of these needs may be met by different approaches or interventions.

Skills and techniques required by providers

At the workshop there will be a discussion of the skills and techniques required and the opportunity to practise them.

These skills and techniques are commonly used by mediators in the course of conducting mediations. It takes a little change in emphasis to be able to transfer them to giving professional support to colleagues.

A provider must be able to recognise both the underlying needs and issues for the mediator and the limitations of the support they can provide. If providers are unable to meet the mediator's needs, they should be able to suggest referrals to the appropriate resource.

Establishing the relationship between mediator and professional support provider

This will depend on the type of support required. If it is envisaged that it will be a long-term regular relationship, it will be good practice to formalise matters so parties to it are clear about expectations and costs. Such relationships also need to cover confidentiality and ethical considerations. The nature of the relationship will depend on whether it is within an organisation or personal to the mediator.

It may be advisable to enter into a formal agreement, an example of which is set out below.²

Code of practice

Professional support providers and mediators will:

- (1) Conduct themselves in a way which promotes respect and fairness.
- (2) Create an environment in which the focus is on learning and progress in personal/professional development.
- (3) Be clear about their aims and expectations for being in this relationship.
- (4) Be committed to doing the work they agree to throughout the supervision process.

² From LEADR Supervision Skills training presented by Lynn Blake-Palmer and Paul Hutcheson, 19 and 20 May 2005.

- (5) Understand the limits and boundaries of the relationship.
- (6) Be aware that potential conflicts may arise during the relationship and deal with them quickly and effectively.
- (7) Maintain throughout and beyond the life of the supervision relationship, the level of confidentiality which is appropriate and is agreed at the start of the relationship.

Expectations

The professional support provider and mediator shall agree on and record the expectations of the relationship covering:

- (1) Expectations.
- (2) Frequency of meetings.
- (3) Duration of meetings.
- (4) Approach to initiating meetings.
- (5) Ground rules for meeting discussions (e.g. openness, confidentiality, consulting others).
- (6) Approach to problem resolution.
- (7) Duration of contract (how many sessions, and over what period of time).

Having clarity on the above issues sets the basis of the relationship.

How a professional support session might be conducted

- (1) **Introduction:** overview of the session.
- (2) **Setting the agenda:**
 - (a) identifying the issues to be discussed,
 - (b) establishing the timeframe of the session,
 - (c) reviewing the action points from previous sessions,
 - (d) prioritising.
- (3) **The discussion phase:**
 - (a) Ask questions and probe.
 - (b) Encourage reflection.
 - (c) Once you understand mediator's views, reflections and solutions offer your own observations.
 - (d) Take the necessary time.
 - (e) Make sure you give positive feedback when you can.
 - (f) Don't avoid problems. When reviewing a piece of work, analyse:
 - (i) what happened and why without judging,

- (ii) what learning needs to take place from the problem,
 - (iii) what action points are needed for improvement so something could be done differently next time?
- (4) **Actions:** Where there are action points encourage the mediator to record them, perhaps using their own journal
- (5) **Summary:**
 - (a) At the end of the session ask the mediator to summarise the actions agreed.
 - (b) Check clarity and timeframes.
 - (c) Discuss effectiveness of sessions.
 - (d) Identify any topics to discuss at your next meeting.
 - (e) Set a time and place.
 - (f) Copy the action points.

Encouraging the development of a professional support network

There are a range of options we wish to discuss with people attending the workshop. One possibility is on-line support and networking, for example blog sites. Another possibility is recommending to LEADR that it provides training, accreditation and support for those providing professional support to mediators.