

# What is the difference between mediation and facilitation?

Definitions of mediation and facilitation differ greatly. Here is how to distinguish the two processes.

## 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. (Several mediations can involve co-workers, management and etc.)

## 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.

Sometimes joint counselling is a form of facilitation.

## **Crossovers**

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.