

Book Review

Advancing Workplace Mediation through Integration of Theory and Practice

Marc Kraus*

Advancing Workplace Mediation through Integration of Theory and Practice, edited by Katalien Bollen, Martin Euwema & Lourdes Munduate, ISSN 2199-4544 (also available as an eBook), 263 p. Springer International Publishing AG, 2016, Switzerland

Recently Springer published another title within the series *Industrial Relations & Conflict Management*. The authors Katalien Bollen, Martin Euwema and Lourdes Munduate (hereafter “the authors”) are three highly accredited academics within the fields of mediation, psychology and conflict management. The authors aspire to provide a synthesis from multiple disciplines and areas in which workplace mediation has been addressed. They underline the central message that mediation perspectives, strategies and tactics used by mediators should fit in the geometry (three dimensions that are important when deciding for mediation) of the conflict and the broader landscape of the organization as well as the society in which it is taking place. This book brings together the contributions of practitioners from different disciplines such as management, law, psychology and human resources.

This well-structured book is easy to read. Often theories are being explained by understandable, real-life cases with which mediators as well as managers will easily identify.

In this book, the authors introduce their newly developed 3-R model of workplace mediation. This is a pyramid-style model, which they describe as a ‘heuristic model that can help mediators to get insight in the char-

acteristics of the environment that affects the mediation process and that may help them in choosing the adequate mediation tactics’. The model explains the following three dimensions: Regulations (regulatory frameworks at societal, sectoral and organizational level), Roles (role expectation of the conflicting parties) and Relations (characteristics of the relationship between the conflicting parties). As to the authors, workplace mediation should always be understood in the context of these three dimensions.

Using the book in practice, this 3-R model serves as a framework to structure four themes: the mediation process, the context of workplace mediation, other third-party roles and new developments (e-mediation). This book has 14 chapters of which I want to explore some in more detail.

Chapter 2 offers an easy-to-use matrix of 16 types of mediation situations, fully supported by an analysis of the situation, role, mediator focus and strategy within both a constrained and unconstrained context. This chapter also introduces a new theoretical approach to mediation by offering a model of adaptive mediation. This model identifies four fundamental dimensions of workplace conflict and suggests different strategies and tactics that fit with the situation at hand.

In Chapter 4, K. Harnack successfully explains the importance of Tversky and Kahneman’s hypothetical choice paradigm, their ideas of framing and their prospect theory. This chapter gives the reader an understanding of the psychological consequences of inter- and intra-individual differences in perception. I think it is especially important that mediators understand the basic theory of the hypothetical choice paradigm as explained in Tversky and Kahneman’s example called the ‘Asian Disease Problem’ (1981). Parties can become risk-averse when we think in terms of gain (choosing the safe bet)

* Marc Kraus LL.M., is based in Amsterdam and works at Dialogue BV, The Netherlands.

and risk seeking when we face a losing frame (choosing the gamble).

The mediator must always be aware that the presentation and documentation of information strongly influences the cognitive processing of information and therefore the mediation process.

In Chapter 6, Tricia Jones introduces the powerful process of conflict coaching. She writes about the synergies between conflict coaching and workplace mediation. Jones also introduces conflict coaching as a wrap-around service to support any other alternative dispute resolution process as a singular and stand-alone process.

Chapter 11 gives an insight from the manager's perspective as a mediator. In my opinion, Thelma Butts offers great tools for managers to cope with conflicts in their daily work. Components of constructive conflict resolution techniques are shared with the reader, supported by a real-life case. As a reader, you truly identify with this manager. Butts teaches us that 'a manager that knows how to use constructive conflict resolution techniques may serve as guarantor of mediations by external mediators, and therefore of the quality of conflict resolution in his or her workplace'.

Throughout the book, the authors express the relevance of the fact that the use and effectiveness of workplace mediation should always be understood in the *context* of regulations, roles and relations. As the authors say, 'it takes three to tango', referring to the interplay of conflicting parties, their mediator and the geometry of workplace mediation.

So, what is new? Novelties can be found in this 3-R model of workplace mediation inspired by Budd and Colvin's theory (2008): 'the geometry of dispute resolution procedures'. Whereas Budd and Colvin argue that an optimal dispute resolution procedure provides a balance between efficiency, equity and voice, the 3-R model proposes a contingency approach where regulations, roles and relations together define the most appropriate design of a mediation system. It is specifically this contingent approach the authors added to Budd and Colvin's model that paves the way to design an optimal and effective workplace mediation system.

It is difficult to define which elements are missing in this book. An aspect that could have made the book even more inclusive would have been a chapter about (university) education on mediation and the role governments have in this matter. Education of students in mediation is, after all, of fundamental importance for the current and future landscape of mediators and mediation in all kind of organizations.

Bollen, Euwema and Munduate have succeeded in making *Advancing Workplace Mediation through Integration of Theory and Practice* a useful source for managers, mediators, employees, and human resource professionals. It is in fact a must-read for these professionals.

Throughout the book, the authors share their opinion that mediation may not always be appropriate, such as in cases of criminal nature, serious power imbalances or when setting a precedent is important. Mediation is not a panacea for all types of workplace disputes. And it is

this nuance that makes the messages in this book so valuable for professionals.

The authors repeatedly express their concern and call to action for the little evidence-based research conducted regarding workplace mediation. This book truly offers a first step in responding to this concern, and it should be received as an invitation to commence with more empirical research.