

# Thinking Differently – and Making a Difference



In the training courses that Core offers a wide range of organisations, companies and individuals, they find that common themes emerge. Many of these capture the changing approaches to problem-solving and managing differences which are becoming part of the fabric of modern business and decision-making for managers, HR personnel and other key decision-makers. Here, **Pamela Lyall**, Director of Mediation Services, Core Solutions Group explains why...

**Building** a culture where policy and decision-making, governance and resource allocation reflect the real needs and interests of people and organisations has become a priority for many.

In practice, this may mean:

**Becoming dispute-wise:** avoiding the time and expense of ongoing conflict, whether in the workplace or with external contractors and suppliers, and introducing protocols to maximise useful cooperation.

It is not easy to deal with situations of conflict. Whether managing up or managing down, or dealing with customers, contractors or in B2B situations, difficulties arise. Positions can soon become polarised and little things can be perceived as deliberate attacks or unhelpful obstruction. Trust is easily lost as fear, egos, personalities, agendas, values and expectations get in the way of genuine understanding. This is not good for business.

In the US, many businesses have become "dispute-wise." They integrate handling of contentious issues into the overall business planning process, seeking to reduce the uncertainty of ongoing disputes, whether litigious or not, and to work in an environment where senior management is focused on preserving relationships and resolving differences rather than on winning every point or aggressively litigating.

The American Arbitration Association has found that the most "dispute wise" US companies are more likely to have stronger relationships with customers, suppliers, employees and partners and that their price : earnings ratios are on average 68% higher than those of the least "dispute wise" companies.

**Negotiating effectively:** being creative, generating real options, moving from bottom-line positioning to interest-based, flexible thinking – and making a real difference to both

sides of a contract or a relationship.

This may involve changing the mind-set, transcending the culture of right / wrong or win / lose and looking to be innovative and imaginative or, as one CEO put it, finding "pragmatic resolutions not contractually based, legally stated ones". Where are the mutual gains? What are the common interests? And always keeping in mind the big picture rather than being immersed in the small stuff.

One way to do this is to harness the power of mediation: "You saved me a fortune and endless agony" was how another senior businessman described the benefits of employing an experienced independent mediator to help resolve a commercial dispute. In workplace situations, deploying an internal or external facilitator to help people with differences to resolve these can reap dividends: "A very effective means to bring both parties together, find common ground, build bridges, understand respective positions and listen to what each other has to say, in a non-confrontational and supportive atmosphere."

**Using well-trying Tips and Techniques:** in mediation and negotiation, whether facilitated or direct, there are many ways to be effective in dealing with difficult situations:

- **Separating the people from the problem** - you can be rigorous about the issues while always showing respect for the individuals involved.
- **Surprising the other person** - by making a unilateral concession or offering something which is important to them – and waiting for the reciprocal response.
- **Breaking the issues down** into bite-size chunks and establishing your priorities – and theirs.
- **Running on parallel lines and parking** – not getting bogged down on one issue - keeping several different options open and leaving some issues to the side if they are a difficulty – their importance may change later.
- **Testing reality** - "what will happen if....." - taking them to the precipice to look over the edge, but offering a way back which engages and meets their needs.
- **Being creative** - "what if we did....." – not being afraid to think out of the box - out of the range of ideas there may come a gem!
- **Summarising progress** - having each person summarise the other's position in each other's words – a powerful way to ensure that each shows that they have listened to and understood the other.
- **Accepting uncertainty and discomfort** – and using it productively to try to find new ways of doing things.

At Core, our facilitators, mediators and coaches seek to make a difference. Contact us at [www.core-solutions.com](http://www.core-solutions.com)