

ASSESSING A WORKPLACE CONFLICT

HOW

It is preferable to use face-to-face, confidential interviews with each of the individuals involved in the conflict to assess all aspects of the conflict. Telephone interviews may be appropriate if there are geographic or time factors to consider. The mediator asks open ended, non-blaming questions in the areas outlined below.

The questions below are intended to give the mediator some guidance during the interview process. The initial inquiry question can be as simple as: **“Tell me how you see the problem.”**

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING INTERVIEW PROCESS

- Who is involved in the problem? (Identify both internal and external people.)
- How long has the conflict been going on?
- Can the people involved in the conflict talk to each other? Do they need assistance or coaching when talking to each other?
- Was the problem caused by unclear expectations or lack of clarity about their role in the workplace?
- Are there underlying structural or organizational problems that lead to the conflict?
- Are parties involved in any other type of dispute resolution process (grievance, litigation, etc.)?
- Are other employees “siding” with the parties involved in the conflict?
- Are either or all of the parties involved in the conflict alleging civil rights, discrimination or harassment violations?
- What types of power, both informal and formal, do the parties have in the organization? Is retaliation an issue?
- Is it an option to move one or both of the parties to another department within the organization?
- Do any or all of the parties involved in the conflict need time to “cool off” emotionally before implementing a conflict resolution process?
- Is there any information needed about the organizational culture?
- What is the appropriate “dress” in the organization?

WHAT ARE YOU ASSESSING?

- The ability or desire of the parties to speak directly with each other.
- The need for an organizational intervention vs. an interpersonal intervention.
- Are power imbalances so severe that a collaborative, face-to-face conflict resolution process would be unethical?
- Is the problem “solvable?” Do the parties want to solve the problem or voluntarily participate in mediation?
- What is the least intrusive and least disruptive process for solving this particular problem?
- If the parties involved in the conflict reach a solution, will the problem be solved?

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