

STYLES OF 3RD PARTY INTERVENTION

Stakeholders locked in a situation of conflict, or even simple disagreement, find it difficult to work together towards a satisfactory accommodation. They find that the complexity of having to deal with each other as well as the substantive problem just too difficult.

This is where they need the help of someone who is independent of both the people and the problem. Someone who can concentrate on the way in which they go about dealing with the issues rather than the issues themselves.

This other person, who is called the 'third party', may be a facilitator, mediator, moderator or arbitrator according to the way they act - and the way they act depends on the situation. Unfortunately there is no universally accepted definition of these styles of operation, just differences so it's worth detailing what we mean:

Facilitation

Facilitators work where the conflict is minor or non-existent. They tend to be employed to design and run multi-party problem solving processes - basically to prevent the debilitating effects of adversarial behaviour. They concentrate exclusively on the process and very rarely work with the parties separately.

Mediation

Mediators tend to operate where the conflict is already manifest, and it is more a question of managing it than preventing it. They usually start by working with the parties separately, as a prelude to bringing them together. They also avoid getting involved with the substantive problem.

Moderation

Moderators operate more like a conventional chairperson than anything else. They tend to be involved in situations of mild or no conflict, but are expected to be actively involved in the content. It is expected that they have an opinion and that they express it.

Arbitration

Arbitrators can only function when the parties hand over responsibility for the decision to them. This is usually where the conflict is overt, and relatively strong. They listen to the arguments of the parties - always when they are together - and then decide on the best way forward.

It is important to point out that these styles are not always so discrete - they merge into one another and a third party may well shift from one to the other. There are no clear differences except at the extremes.

Content and Conflict Interaction

PROCESS/CONTENT FOCUS	STATE OF PARTICIPANTS	
	Cooperative	Competitive
Process only	Facilitation	Mediation
Process & content	Moderation	Arbitration