



What skills do you need as an HR professional?

During our programme, you will learn effective skills to support you as an HR professional in conversations, conflict situations, and daily practice.

Various roles

As an HR professional, you take on many roles. You advise management, serve as an informal and/or formal confidant, act as a negotiator, and in many cases also as a mediator. A true professional multitasker. Each of these roles requires different skills, starting with the ability to recognise the situation and choose your role accordingly.

Since the skills of an HR professional overlap significantly with those of a mediator, the ADR Institute, a leading training centre in mediation, conflict resolution, and negotiation skills, has developed a training programme especially for the HR community: Mediation for HR Professionals. This brochure outlines the skills and techniques covered in this six-day programme.

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“I am a confidant.
What is my role in a conflict?”

“I want to get a manager to take action,
but what is the right approach?”

“I am mediating a workplace conflict,
but how should I deal with my own judgement?”

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How do you deal with your own opinion?

One of the most persistent misconceptions about mediation is that as a mediator, you are not allowed to have an opinion. Of course you have one! The real question is: how do you handle it professionally?

Imagine someone asks for your advice and you share your opinion. Do you really understand the problem well enough? Do you know what is truly going on before you respond? Are you aware of the question behind the question?

The strength of our programme lies in teaching you not to jump to solutions too quickly. To offer good advice, or to mediate effectively, you must first uncover the true cause of the issue. To do that, you need to engage in effective conversation, using the following skills: metacommunication, peeling, reframing, and reflection.



Metacommunication



Peeling



Reframing



Reflection

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“These skills support you in every role: as an advisor to management, as a confidant, a negotiator, and in many cases, also in your role as mediator.”

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“If you just apply a trick, it will not be effective. You have to find your own words.”

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This quote says it all: to be truly effective, you need to make these skills your own.

If you do not believe in what you are saying, or if you apply the skills like a checklist, the impact will be minimal. Our training is designed to help you apply these skills in your own way, with your own voice. We do this with highly experienced trainers and the optimal mix of theory and practical exercises.

Read more about the skills:



Metacommunication



Reframing



Peeling



Reflection





1. Metacommunication

Stepping back from the content

Metacommunication means communicating about the communication itself. For example, a chairperson does this at the start of a meeting to clarify who may speak when.

In HR work, metacommunication is equally useful. For instance, before a performance review, a manager can explain the purpose of the conversation and ask permission to openly discuss all aspects of the employee's functioning, both what is going well and what needs attention.

Metacommunication is also helpful when a conversation becomes strained, as in the following example:



A conversation between an HR professional and an inexperienced manager started off smoothly, but soon grew increasingly tense. The HR professional sensed resistance and responded by trying to convince the manager. She assumed he was simply dreading the employee meetings due to inexperience.

In this case, metacommunication could have helped reveal what was really going on with the manager and possibly resolved the tension. The key is stepping away from the content to explore the shift in the conversation and naming it without judgement. That lack of judgement is crucial to avoid fuelling further resistance.



2. Reframing

What need or interest is hidden underneath?

When a problem or conflict arises, one party often expresses themselves through blaming others. This usually leads to the other party becoming defensive or responding with blame in return.

“Look at yourself, you are not perfect either.” Reframing begins with identifying the need or interest hidden beneath the accusation. Once you sense that, you can respectfully and tentatively test your assumption.

If you are off, you can ask: *“Then what is your actual need, concern, or interest?”*

In a mediation setting, and in the presence of the manager, you could ask for a reaction. But ideally, you would ask: *“What do you need?”* or *“What is important to you here?”* You do not want to reinforce the existing action-reaction dynamic.

Example:



“My manager is constantly breathing down my neck. It feels like I cannot do anything right.” Reframed: *“Are you saying you would like more space and recognition for what you do?”* “Yes, he just does not trust me and I think he wants to get rid of me.” “So trust is a factor—and you are worried about your job security?”



3. Peeling

From position to interest

In conversations about problems or conflict, people tend to rush toward a solution or agreement.

A more effective approach is to first uncover what someone truly cares about. You do this by peeling: asking questions that take you from stated positions to underlying interests. A key element of peeling is the reflective question, which encourages deeper thinking and uncovers motivations. Phrases like “What if...” are often helpful.

In the example below, the manager was focused on turning a “no” into a “yes.” But with peeling, we say: *“In order to change someone’s mind, you first need to know what is in it.”*

Two strong peeling questions: *“How would it help you if what you wish for happened?” “What if there were no alternatives, what worries you most?”* As it turned out, the employee was afraid to drive on the highway. That issue was then addressed and solved, short term and long term. Two people relieved.

Example:



After a reorganisation, an employee refused to relocate to a new office, which added 20 minutes to her commute. Despite clear and persuasive explanations, she continued to refuse. The manager grew frustrated, tensions escalated, and the employee eventually went on sick leave.



4. Reflection

Observation is key

You have probably heard of the communication method LSD: Listening, Summarising, Probing. Reflection goes a step further. To reflect well, you must observe, not just listen.

When someone repeats themselves over and over, it is often because they do not feel heard. Not on content, but on emotion. Reflecting helps them feel understood and gives them space to express themselves more clearly.

Imagine an employee is speaking negatively about a colleague. You might say: *"It sounds like you are saying collaboration is no longer possible."* They might respond: *"Yes, it is just not working anymore."* Or: *"No, I would just like to have more check-ins."* Either way, you gain clarity, which helps move the conversation forward.

Example:



Everyone knows the example of the elephant in the room: something that is clearly there, everyone sees and feels it, but nobody points out that it is there. In that case, reflection is often a good starting point: *"What you are saying is...?" "It sounds like this is really weighing on you, am I right?" "Are you saying that...?"*