



This is a regular look at recent news in the world of mediation, focusing in particular on the workplace and throwing in some of my own views for good measure. In this edition the rising Employment Tribunal backlog gives concern, especially with new changes in the law unlikely to help. Plus I feature a really hot topic - Artificial Intelligence (AI) - in a couple of the articles I review. The benefits and threats are potentially massive, but we are only just starting to understand them.

Marc Reid

## Unwelcome new record for employment tribunal cases

I seem to have written so many times in this newsletter that there are record numbers of cases in backlog for Employment Tribunal. The latest set of figures is no different. As reported by City AM (see [here](#)), the July - Sept 2025 figures show that there were 515,000 open cases. In particular, individual cases went up by a third to 52,000. It is incredible to think that this quantity of people could have their lives effectively on hold for up to two years waiting for the tribunal. What is worse, is that the new Employment Rights Act is, by all accounts, set to make things worse. Under the changes due in Jan 2027 protection from unfair dismissal will become a right after 6 months (compared with 2 years currently) and the limit on compensatory award for unfair dismissal will be removed. All of which says to me that employers should be looking to resolve disputes well before legal action is taking place - and of course, mediation is an effective way to do this.

## A positive view of workplace conflict for 2026



This article from Forbes magazine by experienced mediator Anna Shields (see [here](#)) takes a wonderfully positive approach to the start of 2026. She sets out the case for 'hope' which for many might seem like a major challenge given the current state of the world. Anna lays out the argument for why, in the field of workplace conflict at least, she is optimistic. Particularly pleasing is that 'conflict mitigation' is now one of the most sought after skills when recruiting. This is fundamental to being able to shift away from the dangerous formal processes to informal resolution focused approaches which are far more beneficial, and significantly less harmful, for all involved.

Want to share a thought or make an enquiry? We'll be glad to hear from you:

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## AI impacting workplace conflict

AI features in two interesting articles from People Management magazine. The first (see [here](#)) mentions that in its new 5 year strategy ACAS sees AI and technology in general as a key part of managing workplace disputes more effectively. There is no detail on how ACAS plans to use it but opinions in the article suggest that whilst AI can help at the edges, human interaction will need to remain at the heart of conflict resolution. The second article (see [here](#)) points to another trend that many in HR are experiencing - the AI generated grievance. HR and employment lawyers are seeing long and complex grievances, most likely generated by AI and are having to come up with ways of dealing with them. The article suggests some approaches, not least increased use of mediation!

## ACAS conflict survey results

acas working for everyone This article from ACAS (see [here](#)) highlights their recent research into workplace conflict and presents some of the headline findings. Sadly 44% of people participating in this extensive survey had experienced conflict at work in the past 12 months - the highest level recorded in a survey of this type. On a more positive note, it seems people are managing to resolve conflict informally, particularly through discussion with their line manager or with the person directly. Under 10% used formal approaches but that is still a very high number of grievances. Unsurprisingly conflict causes stress, with over half of those experiencing conflict suffering from stress, anxiety or depression. More figures which make the case for informal resolution.

**Our website provides a range of great resources, most of which are free, including our ebook '8 Stages of Workplace Conflict'. Take a look at the website at [www.mediation4.co.uk](http://www.mediation4.co.uk)**

## Why is conflict rising?

Looking at the output of the ACAS survey (see above) this article (click [here](#)) goes behind the numbers and considers what might be driving this increase in workplace conflict. The author picks out two societal trends as potential reasons - rise of individualism and polarisation, and two workplace issues, generational shifts and managers under pressure. There is no doubt that the increasing focus on ourselves as individuals and polarisation of views impacts people's workplace relationships and managers therefore need to have the necessary training and skills to address these potentially dangerous situations. Add in the demands of potentially 5 different generations in the workforce and it is not difficult to see how fertile ground exists for interpersonal conflict.

## Can AI do mediation?



I've already featured Artificial Intelligence in this newsletter but I'm returning to it as my recent blog focused on the whether AI could do workplace mediation. I ran a little experiment, giving Chat GPT 5 typical workplace mediation scenarios and asked what approach AI would recommend in each case. The results were shocking - they were amazingly good! But does that mean our jobs as workplace mediators are under threat? Knowing what to do is only half the answer and being a mediator is much more than having the right knowledge. What else comes into it? Well read the blog (see [here](#)) to find out my view!