



Checking the foundations

Book review

Mediation and Dispute Resolution, Contemporary Issues and Developments, by Tony Whatling (2021) London

by Delma Sweeney

Tony Whatling has written a highly readable book examining in depth a number of mediation developments, bringing his vast experience in social work, mediation practice and training to this exploration.

His previous publication *Mediation Skills and Strategies – A Practical Guide* (2012) holds that good professional mediation interventions draw on an appropriate collection of mediation knowledge and tools. This first book focusses on the development of mediation theory skills and strategies. His new book, *Mediation and Dispute Resolution, Contemporary Issues and Developments*, expands on a number of mediation concerns, such as becoming a mediator, the supervision of mediators, gender and cultural awareness, clients' emotional responses, apology and reconciliation, and high conflict. These mediation matters are very well explored and explained, with case illustration in many instances.

Whatling brings an English perspective to the discussion of some of these mediation issues as they were debated in his country's development of a professional mediation association. While this telling may have limited the book, those outside his country may instead contrast and compare how these matters were managed in their own professional associations. For example, he reports that the English lawyer mediation professional association members were wary of the need for mediation supervision but then became most vocal about the need to protect the public from "poorly trained, or untrained mediators". This resulted in an agreement that professional practice consultation, or professional practice supervision (PPS), was an acceptable naming of the practice of supervision in mediation.

In contrast, the Mediators' Institute of Ireland had most resistance to mediator supervision from workplace mediators. Many of these came from unions or the human resources



profession, who believed supervision was an overseeing and corrective process. This was resolved in Ireland by creating “Sharing and Learning Groups”. There was less resistance to supervision by Irish family mediators who regularly attend supervision for their practice.

John Haynes, a leading American authority, was influential in the development of mediation in England. Whatling attended a number of his workshops early in his career as a mediator. While Whatling agrees with many of Haynes’s theoretical perspectives, one of the ways he differs from him is in the management of emotions from past events when working with people in conflict. Whatling explores and shows the effect of apology and reconciliation for those who feel hurt and betrayed and who come in conflict to mediation. He examines this both theoretically and with case examples. His presentation on the significance of apology-by-proxy is important and a very useful methodology if used authentically by mediators in practice.

Whatling republishes for his chapter 3 an article he wrote for this journal in 2016 entitled ‘Difference Matters’. His expertise in cultural awareness is drawn from long years of practice and the provision of mediation training in many countries. He brings this experience to his theoretical understanding of intervening in conflict in different cultures and includes gender in his description of cultural difference. On page 60 he tells us that we as mediators need to “*watch, listen and think* outside the box of our own familiar cultural boxes and begin to challenge our cultural assumptions”. Again, he illustrates issues such as the importance of saving face in some cultures, with case examples that are most helpful in grasping the use of knowledge put into practice. The experience of the author underlying each case example, enables mediators to reflect upon and improve their actions and reinforces reflective practice.

In the introduction to *Mediation and Dispute Resolution, Contemporary Issues and Developments* Tony Whatling sets out an objective that he continues in the style of his first publication, speaking to the reader as a practitioner. His intention is to give an easy-to-follow practice guide, readily comprehensible. In this he is entirely successful.

References

Whatling, T. 2012, *Mediation Skills and Strategies: A Practical Guide*, London [Jessica Kingsley Publishers](#).

Whatling, T. 2016, *Developing Cultural Awareness, Sensitivity, Fluency and Competence in Multi-Cultural Mediation Practice*; *Journal of Mediation and Applied Conflict Analysis*; Maynooth University, Volume 3, Issue 1.



For details of Tony Whatling’s experience and career, see the brief biography at the end of his article ‘Cycles of influence’ in this issue of the Journal.

Delma Sweeney: PhD., DASS (Distinction), CQSW, Dip. Supervision. With over 24 years’ experience as a mediator, she has worked with many conflict situations, such as family mediation and large-scale multiparty mediation. Delma retired as Director of Mediation & Conflict Intervention at the National University of Ireland Maynooth in 2015, having delivered mediation programmes in many specialist mediation fields to masters level for 16 years. Delma is an accredited psychotherapist with the Irish Council of Psychotherapy and currently works as a psychotherapist.