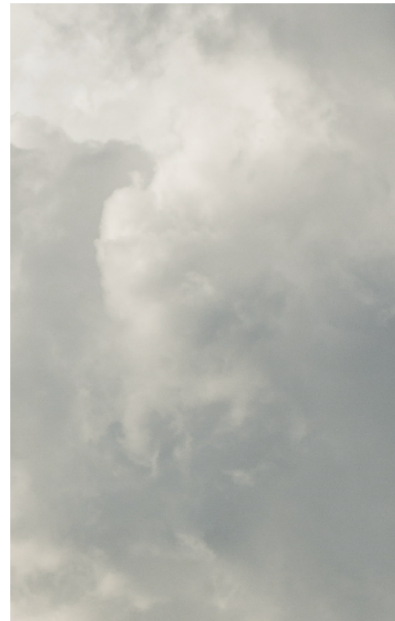


Insightful

Practical

Empowering



# Navigating Workplace Tension

2025

Conflict Resolution  
Systems. Business Events  
and Beyond.

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MEDIATION SERVICES  
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## I) INTRODUCTION

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### CONFLICT RESOLUTION SYSTEMS - BUSINESS EVENTS AND BEYOND

Employees today expect more than just a place of work. Professionals seek space for honest dialogue, involvement on equal footing, and leadership that can be trusted. How interpersonal tension, friction, and conflict is handled becomes an indicator for workplace culture.

My experience shows: how an organisation deals with interpersonal conflict, speaks volumes about its cultural maturity. Are managers equipped to detect early signs of tension and are they able to respond constructively? Are there spaces where psychological safety is not just promised but truly experienced? Are differences able to surface and addressed before they deepen into division?

The pressure points are many - from intergenerational gaps and breakdowns in trust to friction around purpose and values. Structured dialogue and resolution systems offer more than just conflict resolution - they enable growth: for individuals, teams, and workplace culture.

This survey gathered insights from over 100 professionals across the Business Events Industry including executives, managers and human resource experts. These professionals operate under high pressure at the crossroads of logistics, client expectations, and internal coordination — making their experiences with workplace tension highly relevant.

While this study focused on the Business Events Industry, its insights and practical takeaways are valuable to organisations navigating fast-paced service environments, multicultural teams, and change-driven workplaces.

This global survey builds on our work as workplace mediators, facilitators, and trainers — and on our experience that workplace culture is shaped through effective internal communication and the capacity to engage with interpersonal tension constructively.

With this publication, we offer actionable insights that can empower executives, managers and human resource experts to support their organisations in building workplace cultures through better resolution practices.



## I) 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This publication would not have been possible without the generous support and engagement of many.

We are grateful to the **100+ industry professionals** who gifted their time to participate in the survey, sharing not only their insights and experiences but also their vulnerabilities and best practices. Your openness makes this work meaningful and impactful.

Our sincere thanks go to **AIPC** and Sven Bossu, CEO, for endorsing and supporting this initiative; to **The Ops Nest**, particularly Lou Kiwanuka, for their organisational backing and continued encouragement; to the **Women in Exhibitions Network** for their invaluable support; and to **Alexandra Mery** for her thoughtful editorial support.

### Sven Bossu - AIPC

“I supported this survey because I believe that effective communication and internal dialogue structures are key to sustaining a healthy and resilient workforce in our industry. Sharing it with our members allowed us to contribute to a meaningful industry-wide conversation.”



### Lou Kiwanuka - The Ops Nest

“Supporting this survey aligns closely with one of the big challenges our industry has always faced. By understanding the cost – in time, confidence, and loss of talent, for example – we can start to promote practical, transparent conflict management, which is crucial for operational excellence. It’s important that our members have the opportunity to contribute and access new knowledge that strengthens our sector.”



This marks the **third survey** we have conducted within the Business Events Industry, with the goal of raising awareness and highlighting best practices in conflict prevention, management, and resolution. With the strongest participation to date, this edition stands as a testament to the importance of this topic — and to the growing need for sustainable, human-centred approaches to addressing workplace differences.

## Oana Cipca - Women in Exhibitions Network

“As a community that values collaboration, inclusion, and mutual growth, we supported this survey to help ensure that workplace dynamics across our industry are safe, respectful, and empowering for all. Collective action starts with shared understanding.”



Throughout this publication, we share not only survey results, but also **industry voices** — paired with insights to our own experience. A practical perspective on where this industry stands, and where opportunities “hide”.

Thank you for being part of this important conversation.

## I) 2. ABOUT HERBERHOLZ MEDIATION SERVICES

Mediation • Facilitation • Dialogue • Process Design

At HERBERHOLZ MEDIATION SERVICES, we partner with executives, managers and human resource professionals to drive organisational health by resolving interpersonal tensions, facilitating difficult conversations, and embedding psychological safe spaces across teams / departments.

We encourage the design of transparent and confidential conflict resolution systems that align with the business values of our clients, and we support conflict management that proactively bridges differences between employees and clients.

Our mission is to contribute to a workplace culture with clear communication, and sustainable practices for managing interpersonal tensions early and effectively.

With multilingual and cross-cultural expertise, we offer personalised:

- **Workshops** to strengthen **team cohesion** and create leadership capabilities for **managing interpersonal challenges**.
- **Professional moderation for meetings and workshops** (Board of Directors, Steering Committees, Work Councils, Project Teams, ...).
- Confidential and independent **on-call mediation and facilitation** services.
- **Enhancement of grievance and escalation procedures** — beyond formal complaint handling.
- **Circular mentoring** for enhanced intergenerational collaboration.

Our approach is people focused and based on the following values:

- **Authenticity** – Methods that follow our clients' work culture.
- **Diversity** – Acknowledging individual strengths.
- **Equality** – Creating inclusive environments that embrace people's differences.
- **Respect** – Promoting empowerment and mutual respect.
- **Confidentiality** – Providing a safe space for constructive dialogue.

From our base in Paris, we collaborate with professionals across the globe—available online and in person, in English, French, and German.



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## II) SURVEY AT A GLANCE

### Have you ever experienced or witnessed internal conflict in your organisation?

95% of survey participants said yes — confirming that workplace tension is omnipresent.

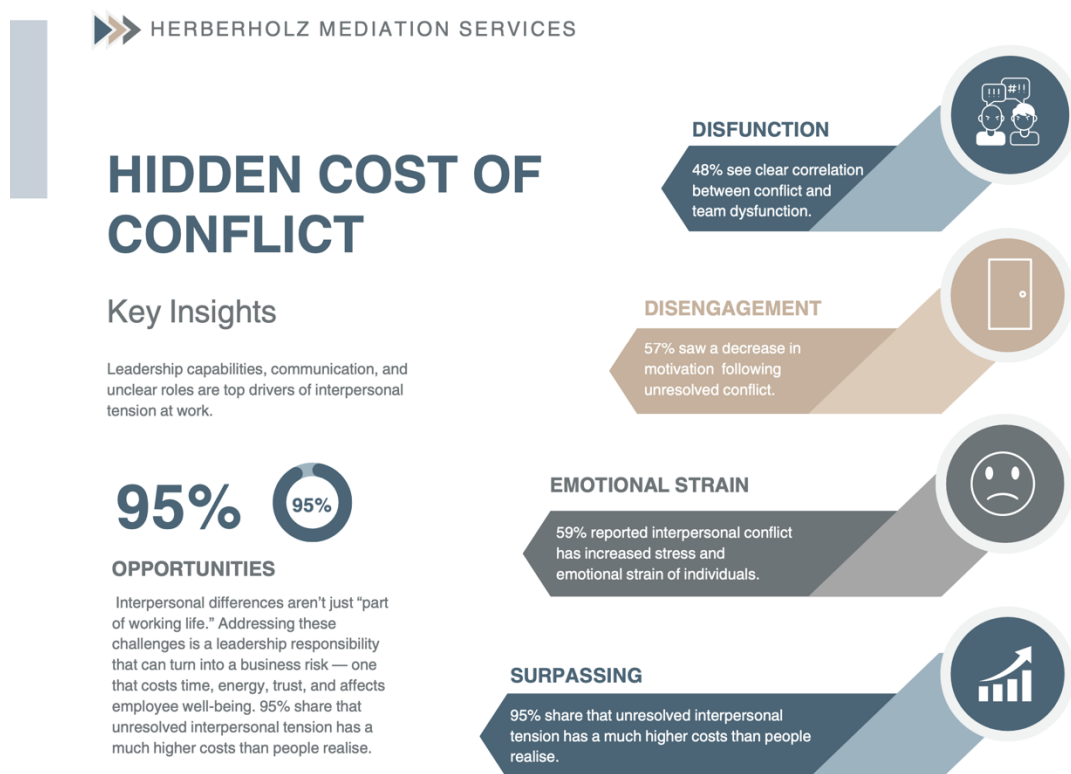
The “Conflict Resolution Systems” survey 2025 sheds light on how organisations in the business events sector handle interpersonal workplace challenges. It highlights where employees struggle most and where leaders can take meaningful action.

### SURVEY GOALS

- Identify how organisations detect and address interpersonal tension.
- Explore employees’ lived experiences of internal challenges.
- Identify gaps between expectations, preparedness, and action.

### WHO TOOK PART

- 100+ professionals from across the Business Events Industry.
- A valuable mix of participants, including executives, managers, and HR professionals — with HR voices represented both in leadership and operational roles.



Source: HMS, Conflict Resolution Systems, 2025

## KEY FINDINGS

- 95% share that unresolved interpersonal tension has higher costs than people realise.
- The impact is significant:
  - 59% reported increased stress and emotional strain.
  - 57% saw a decrease in motivation and engagement.
  - 48% noticed team dysfunction.
  - 45% experienced reduced productivity and efficiency.
- Managers are expected to resolve tension — but nearly 50% do not feel ready. They currently spend on average 3.7 hours per week dealing with interpersonal challenges within their teams — that's nearly 15 hours per month per person.
- Organisations lean on internal structures (manager or HR-led meetings).
- ~24% use professional external support, including mediation.
- Leadership capabilities, communication, and unclear roles are top drivers of interpersonal tension.

## WHAT THIS MEANS

Interpersonal differences aren't just "part of working life." Addressing these challenges is a leadership responsibility that can turn into a business risk — one that costs time, energy, trust, and affects employee well-being.



### III) METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

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For this 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the “Conflict Resolution and Business Events”, HERBERHOLZ MEDIATION SERVICES (HMS) focus on the systematic approach that organisations take to address interpersonal challenges and prevent conflict from escalating.

We employed an online survey approach using both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The data collection period spanned from April to June 2025, during which more than 100 professionals shared their experience with conflict resolution systems at work.

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> survey attracted a highly experienced, diverse group of respondents across 37 countries and regions worldwide. Over 50% hold Executive/C-level or Senior-level roles, with most working in large or mid-sized organisations across Europe, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

More than half have been with their current organisation for over 10 years. Respondents represent all key segments of the business event’s ecosystem, from venues and organisers to associations, service providers, government, media, and consultancies.

**Gary Corin - Managing Director  
Montgomery Group – South Africa**

“Having successfully utilised HMS’s services, it was opportune to participate in a survey that will enhance and extend the value of conflict resolution in the events industry workplace. Based on the survey questions, there is no doubt the results / findings will have a positive impact.”

MONTGOMERY GROUP

This diverse sample represents a comprehensive understanding of conflict resolution practices in the business events industry on a global scale.

A detailed overview of the demographics is displayed in APPENDIX 1).

## IV) FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

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Interpersonal tension at work is a shared reality — yet it's often handled in silence, managed behind the scenes, or brushed aside until it escalates. Across industries, professionals are already spending significant time navigating friction, miscommunication, and misalignment.

### Tammy Sweeney - CEO TCU Place - Canada

"I think it's important to share information like this survey that can help our industry rise. We play such an important role in building communities and connections, as a key driver of economic and cultural impact. If we can lead the way by managing conflict positively and productively, we can lead not only our industry, but also EVERY industry that relies on the power of human contact to thrive."



But are the Business Events Industry well equipped — organisationally and culturally — to manage these challenges constructively? And where are currently missed opportunities.

This three-part section unpacks the survey findings through a practical lens:

1. Explores how aware and ready organisations are to detect and address tension.
2. Focuses on the role leadership plays in shaping culture and modelling responses.
3. Highlights the tools and strategies that help prevent harm and support resolution.

Each section offers detailed insights, common gaps, and concrete actions — not just to manage interpersonal conflict, but to reduce its cost.

## IV) 1. ORGANISATIONAL AWARENESS & READINESS

### Cost of avoided conversations.

Professionals in the Business Events Industry spend on average, **3.7 hours per week** managing internal challenges like interpersonal tension and conflict. That amounts to nearly 15 hours per month — per person.

Yet many organisations are still unsure how to detect and bridge these differences early on.

A 2024 case study, based on 2,000 insurance dossiers conducted in Switzerland, found that nearly 60% of mental health-related sick leave was triggered by workplace-related conflict.

This section explores how companies recognise and respond to interpersonal challenges. It looks at both formal structures (e.g. policies and processes) and informal dynamics (e.g. leadership, workplace culture, psychological safety, and employee awareness).

## KEY INSIGHTS

- Tensions are acknowledged, but few organisations have clearly defined systems or transparent communication channels to strengthen conflict resolution.
- Responsibility is often fragmented:
  - 69% say direct managers handle these tensions.
  - 66% refer to HR.
  - 63% cite senior leadership.
  - 24% mention external professional support like mediation service.
  - 5% report no clear point of responsibility.

FINDINGS	TAKEAWAYS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most differences are handled without structure or support.</li> <li>Where processes exist, awareness and access vary widely.</li> <li>Conflict prevention and management training remains an exception.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal challenges are costly in time, energy, and morale.</li> <li>Organisations can benefit from early-stage intervention.</li> <li>Shifting from avoidance to action requires clear internal frameworks and skilled leadership.</li> </ul>

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANISATIONS

If professionals spend almost **4 hours per week** on addressing interpersonal tensions — isn't it time to do it more effectively? Here are some examples how:

- Clearly define and communicate how interpersonal challenges can be addressed, assign responsibilities and be clear about consequences.
- Enable external professional support, such as:
  - On-Call Mediation services for confidential guidance and conflict resolution.
  - Expert-facilitated conversations to support difficult conversations.
  - Confidential hotlines / on-call professionals for guidance
- Empower team leaders and HR professionals with capability building workshops and frameworks that allow early intervention.

## POSITIVE TRENDS

- Professional support is showing impact: 24% report using **mediation services** in 2025 — this displays an **increase of 10%** compared to 2023.
- Structured approaches like expert **facilitated dialogue** increases openness without fearing negative consequences for speaking up.
- 45% of organisations offer or plan to implement **training focused on soft skills** for enhanced conflict prevention, and resolution — up +7% from 2023 survey.

## IN SUMMARY

Interpersonal disagreements cost professionals in the Business Events Industry nearly 15 hours per month and many organisations lack clear structures or ownership for handling them. Responsibility is fragmented, and hesitation still exists among professionals to consult external support for in-house challenges.

Early-stage intervention and structured frameworks are still rare, but the trend is shifting. Where external expertise and soft-skill training are introduced, positive impact across teams is growing.

It's the right time to dare moving beyond ad-hoc conflict management and traditional grievance procedures. It is time to invest in clear processes and professional support that saves time and promotes a workplace culture of healthy conflict prevention and resolution.

## IV) 2. LEADERSHIP & CULTURE

### CONVERSATIONS SHAPE WORKPLACE CULTURE — ONE DIALOGUE AT A TIME

How leaders respond to interpersonal tension directly shapes workplace culture.

Culture is not what's written in a values statement or policy — it's how people experience everyday interactions at work. It is the sum of all conversations we do have... and those we avoid.

Every skipped conversation reinforces a culture of avoidance.

And every brave, facilitated, open conversation strengthens a culture of trust, collaboration, and resilience.

**Workplace Culture = behaviours + dialogues + silences**

Younger employees are especially impacted: unresolved tension is a growing cause of long-term absence.

This section explores how leadership shapes the organisation's ability to navigate interpersonal tensions. It considers both visible actions (e.g. responsibility, communication style, ...) and workplace culture (e.g. holistic safety and trust).

### KEY INSIGHTS

- **Leadership behaviour** influences how safe people feel to speak up.
- 70% agree **conflict needs careful handling** — but fewer than half feel equipped to do so well.
- Managers are expected to **manage tension**, yet nearly 50% were not formally trained.

FINDINGS	TAKEAWAYS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There's a gap between what's expected of team leaders and their perceived preparedness.</li> <li>• Many employees carry tension alone, lacking safe ways to raise concerns.</li> <li>• Psychological safety remains low in many teams.</li> <li>• Interpersonal conflicts are either viewed as natural or as a risk — leading to inconsistent responses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership sets the tone. When leaders embrace conflict resolution as a core responsibility, teams gain resilience and develop trust.</li> <li>• Silence can be as damaging as poor communication — skipped conversations send powerful signals.</li> <li>• Unresolved tension is not just a cultural problem. It's a leadership task — and can evolve into a business risk.</li> </ul>

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANISATIONS

- Provide targeted training and frameworks for structured difficult conversations.
- Foster psychological safety by embedding inclusive communication practices.
- Use intergenerational dialogue to reduce gaps in expectations and expression. Think about Circular Mentoring.
- Empower employees to manage upwards — encouraging open dialogue without fear.

What would change if we normalised open, guided dialogue at all levels?

## IN SUMMARY

Unresolved tension isn't just a cultural concern — it's a leadership issue and a business risk. Many employees carry tension alone, without safe ways to raise concerns, while nearly 50% of managers tasked with handling these challenges do not feel equipped to do so.

Leadership behaviour sets the tone: when conflict resolution is embraced as a core responsibility, teams gain resilience and trust. Yet silence, avoidance, and inconsistent responses persist.

Now is the time for organisations to invest in targeted training, structured frameworks, and professional support — because interpersonal conflict is inevitable, but its impact is optional.

## IV) 3. SUPPORT & STRATEGY

### THE RIGHT KEY TO OPEN THE RIGHT DOOR

Interpersonal tensions left unresolved don't just disappear — they escalate quietly. From declining productivity to absenteeism and legal risk, workplace conflict has measurable costs.

The question isn't whether conflict prevention and resolution tools exist — but whether organisations are using them strategically.

This section examines how organisations approach workplace conflict and how effectively they resolve it. It assesses the efficiency of the tools, processes, and support systems in place, and considers whether existing strategies are applied thoughtfully — combining the right measures, at the right time, with the appropriate support — to safeguard well-being, sustain productivity, and preserve a healthy organisational culture.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- **Resolution meetings with managers (structured discussions)** – Approximately 73% of respondents report using this approach to address workplace challenges.
- **Resolution meetings involving HR (structured discussions)** – About 61% engage HR in these conversations to support resolution efforts.
- **Coaching (personalised one-on-one guidance)** – Used by 45% of respondents as a tool to support individuals.
- **Formal investigations (fact-finding inquiries to determine misconduct)** – Implemented by 35% of respondents to address more serious concerns.
- **Facilitated talks with a neutral third party (outside of the team and HR)** – 29% make use of this form of guided conversation.
- **Conflict assessments (structured analysis of the nature, dynamics, and impact of tensions)** – Applied by 28% to gain deeper insight into the root causes and effects of conflict.
- **Mediation (structured process led by an external professional mediator)** – Used by 23% to access external professional and confidential support.

### TOP DRIVERS OF TENSION

Poor communication, unclear roles, and leadership style consistently emerge as the leading sources of tension. These issues can benefit from structured, proactive resolution strategies.

FINDINGS	TAKEAWAYS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consequences of unresolved tensions include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower motivation and engagement (85%).</li> <li>Decreased productivity (82%).</li> <li>Damaged team culture (74%).</li> <li>Higher turnover (60%).</li> <li>Sick leave (44%).</li> <li>Legal costs and reputational risks (over 35%).</li> </ul> </li> <li>Internal tools exist but are often inconsistent, unclear, or distrusted.</li> <li>Neutral third-party support remains underused, often due to cost concerns or lack of awareness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Without early support, tensions snowball. Internal roles like HR and managers are essential to manage conflict and they thrive with professional support.</li> <li>Structured interventions (e.g. conflict assessments, facilitated conversations and mediation) are highly effective informal tools and their full potential is yet to be released.</li> </ul>

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANISATIONS

- Using conflict assessments to choose the right path for resolution.
- Create support systems for employees.
- Investing in early-stage intervention — mediation — to avoid conflict escalation.
- Training employees to embed facilitated conversations into routine processes.

We have a range of tools at our disposal — but are we using the right ones, in the right order, and with the right support to achieve meaningful and sustainable resolution?

## IN SUMMARY

Too often, internal tension is labelled a “soft issue” — until its effects become impossible to ignore. When responses are reactive or inconsistent, the costs climb.

While many organisations have internal tools in place, their use is often reactive, inconsistent, or unsupported.

To protect engagement, performance, and well-being, the focus must shift towards intentional strategies: early intervention, targeted training, and the thoughtful use of neutral expertise.



## V) DEEP DIVE

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The findings — drawn from over 100 professionals across the business events industry — highlight the tangible return of investing for structured conflict prevention, resolution frameworks, and capacity-building through training and external support.

### V) 1. EFFICIENCY MATTERS

Our survey asked: “On average, how much of your working time per week is spent addressing or managing misalignment between employees/teams?”

Responses paint a clear picture: while some professionals spend less than 5% of their time on these issues, others devote 40% or more — a significant part of their week.

Professionals in the business events industry spend, on average, **3.7 hours per week** managing internal challenges like interpersonal tension and conflict. That amounts to nearly **15 hours per month** — per person

#### KEY INSIGHT

Those spending 20–40% or more of their time on interpersonal challenges typically lack awareness of internal mechanisms that could help. They represent all levels — business owners, C-level executives, senior managers — with no notable regional or gender differences.

At the efficient end of the spectrum, is where professionals spend less than 5% of their working time on interpersonal challenges.

By contrast, those who spend less than 5% of their time on interpersonal differences often have clear, well-communicated internal processes and know how to use them.

#### OPPORTUNITY FOR ORGANISATIONS

Well-communicated internal conflict prevention and management frameworks measurably reduce time spent on interpersonal challenges. Where internal pathways are known, transparent and accessible, workplace conflict management becomes more efficient — with measurable productivity gains.

## V) 2. INTERNAL PROCESSES ARE KEY

“If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”  
Anonymous proverb.

A clear internal framework to address interpersonal challenges in the workplace is fundamental for conflict prevention and resolution — the untapped potential for organisations in the Business Events Industry is enormous.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- 49% report their organisation lacks a clear process for handling disagreements, while 5% are currently developing one.
- Where a framework exists, 73% report it is unclear or unknown.
- Where no clear guidance exists, employees report higher time loss and uncertainty, often relying on formal grievance procedures.

### OPPORTUNITY FOR ORGANISATIONS

Strengthening and promoting internal conflict management processes builds trust across the organisation, especially when interpersonal differences are present.

## V) 3. PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Despite limited structured access to external facilitators, interest in professional support, such as mediation, is substantial.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- 84% see value in a neutral space for difficult conversations.
- 57% believe external neutral support helps prevent escalation.
- 52% would use an external mediation service.
- 53% believe professional support encourages collaborative problem-solving.
- 51% see value for management/HR.
- 30% say it fosters a culture of dialogue and respect.
- 24% use mediation for professional support.



# PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

## Key Insights

Despite limited structured access to external facilitators, interest in professional support, such as mediation, is growing.

# 52%



### OPPORTUNITIES

On-Call Mediation services are increasingly recognised as a cost-effective strategy for addressing workplace conflict. 52% would use an external mediation service to help reduce the burden on HR and management.

Source: HMS, Conflict Resolution Systems, 2025

### DIALOGUE

84% see value in a neutral space for difficult conversations.



### PREVENTION

57% believe external neutral support helps prevent escalation.



### PROBLEM SOLVING

53% believe professional support encourages collaborative problem-solving.



### WORKPLACE CULTURE

30% say external conflict resolution support can promote a culture of dialogue and respect.




## OPPORTUNITY FOR ORGANISATIONS

On-Call Mediation services are increasingly recognised as a cost-effective strategy for addressing workplace conflict. They help reduce the burden on HR and management.

More than just a tool for resolving disputes, on-call mediation goes beyond conflict resolution — offering proactive guidance, clarifying roles, and supporting an open confidential communication.

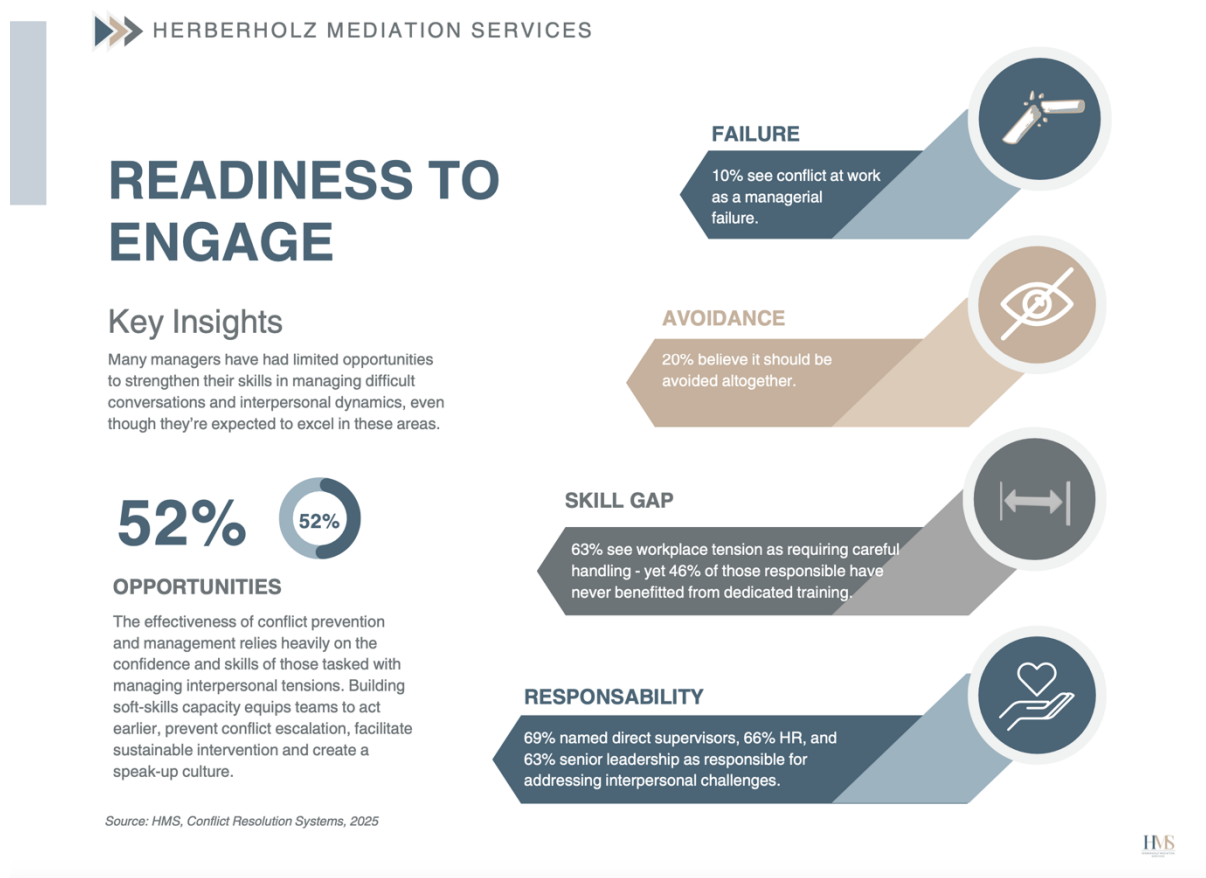
These services assist professionals who may be unsure how to proceed and help to identify effective paths forward. They can also serve as a confidential hotline for individuals seeking expert, impartial support.

## V) 4. READINESS TO ENGAGE

The effectiveness of conflict prevention and management relies heavily on the confidence and skills of those tasked with managing interpersonal tensions. Many managers have had limited opportunities to strengthen their skills in managing difficult conversations and interpersonal dynamics, even though they're expected to excel in these areas.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- 69% named direct supervisors, 66% HR, and 63% senior leadership as responsible for addressing interpersonal challenges.
- 63% see workplace tension as requiring careful handling — yet 46% of those responsible have never benefitted from dedicated training.
- 20% believe it should be avoided altogether.
- 10% see conflict as a sign of failure.



## OPPORTUNITY FOR ORGANISATIONS

Building soft-skills capacity equips teams to act earlier, prevent conflict escalation, facilitate sustainable intervention and create a speak-up culture.



The survey findings highlight the tangible return of investing for structured conflict prevention, resolution frameworks, and capability-building through training and external support.

The most significant factor influencing **time and cost** spent on managing interpersonal challenges is the presence, clarity, and visibility of **trusted internal processes and support structures**.

## VI) REDUCE THE COST OF CONFLICT

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### INVEST IN WHAT WORKS

The survey revealed a great opportunity for **accessible support**, **clear structures**, and **proactive tools** to manage interpersonal challenges in the workplace. When employees face friction or relational stress, the consequences often go unseen—reduced engagement, absenteeism, or even formal complaints—until it's too late.

There is a difference between healthy and unhealthy conflict and the objective is to empower employees to address productive conflict in their teams and have a transparent framework in place to support them on the way.

Interpersonal conflict doesn't need to be costly. Organisations can reduce expenses and improve workplace health by investing in three proven areas:

- **Proactive dialogue support** (when tensions arise)
- **Clear accountability structures** (to know who handles what)
- **Normalised, facilitated conversations** (so differences don't fester)

This section explores what these investments look like in practice and how they support organisations to build resilient teams—while protecting morale, performance, and budget.

### VI) 1. ON-CALL WORKPLACE MEDIATION & FACILITATION

#### **When interpersonal tension rise, costs follow.**

From reduced productivity and team disengagement to staff turnover and burnout, unresolved interpersonal differences quietly erode workplace health—and budgets. But many organisations still struggle to address these challenges effectively. One reason? They lack accessible and impartial support at the moment it matters most.

#### **Introducing a practical solution: On-Call Workplace Mediation & Facilitation.**

This approach equips organisations with a structured, ready-to-activate response to interpersonal tension—before it escalates to formal grievances and complaints. Think of it as your “emergency assistance line” for internal communication breakdowns, delivered by qualified, neutral professionals who step in to help bridge differences and find ways to move forward.

### WHAT IT IS

An **On-Call Mediation** provides confidential, external support for:

- Addressing team friction or breakdowns in collaboration.
- Resolving recurring tensions between individuals or departments.
- Supporting sensitive conversations and meetings.

- Facilitating smoother transitions during organisational changes.
- Providing confidential guidance when professionals are unsure how to proceed
- Strengthening psychological safety through impartial communication support

## WHY IT MATTERS

Early intervention saves money.

Rather than waiting for formal grievances, attrition, or disengagement, organisations can:

- **Sounding board for employees** tasks to have difficult conversations
- **Protect psychological safety** by offering a neutral space to speak.
- **Maintain team cohesion** through guided, respectful conversations.
- **Reduce absenteeism and turnover** linked to unresolved conflict.
- **Unburden internal teams** from navigating highly charged dynamics alone.

## HOW IT WORKS

Through a framework agreement, the organisation establishes an ongoing relationship with an external mediation service familiar with its industry and context.

When a need arises:

- The service is activated on demand.
- Confidential consultations and facilitated sessions are scheduled.
- A clear, outcome-focused process is followed—remotely or in person.

### Paul März - Managing Director fairtrade Messe

“We engaged HMS to support the resolution of a workplace conflict involving three parties within one of our project teams. Thanks to the independent guidance and the safe space created, the colleagues were able to express their views openly, address key issues, and jointly develop workable agreements for future collaboration.”



Our survey data shows that organisations with accessible external mediation support experience measurable, positive impacts on well-being, collaboration, and overall organisational health.

No need to start from scratch for every situation. On-Call Mediation services are flexible, discreet, and cost-effective — providing a safety net for when managers want or need professional support.

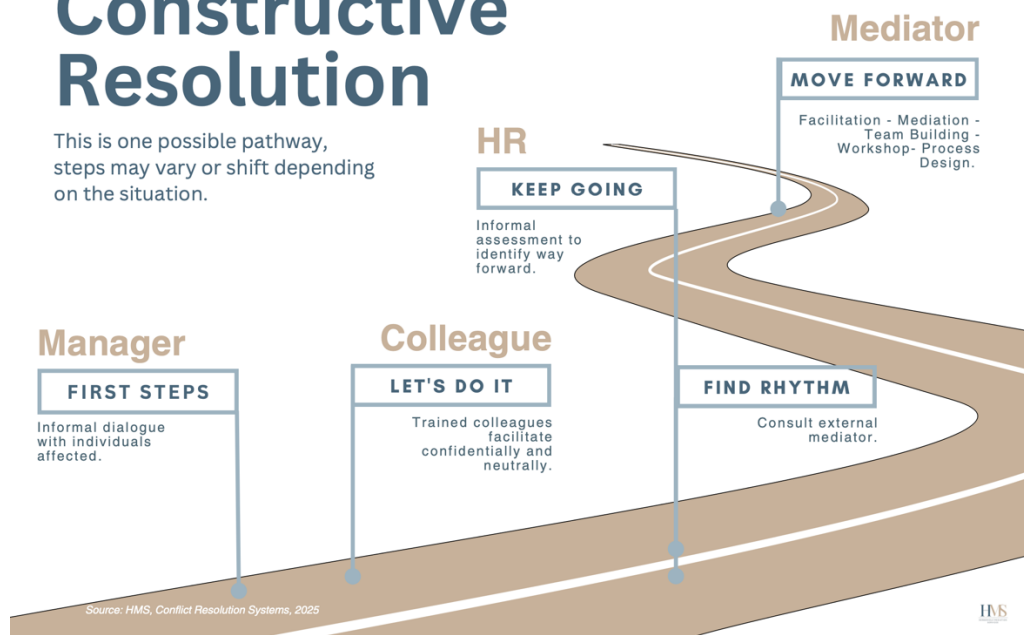
## CROSS-INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Major organisations in France, such as Thales, Orange, SNCF, Crédit Agricole, Renault, AXA, and the French Public Finance Authority, are increasingly adopting mediation to address workplace issues early.

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# Constructive Resolution

This is one possible pathway, steps may vary or shift depending on the situation.





## **BEST PRACTICE**

### **What Happened**

Two colleagues in a cross-functional team developed growing friction over responsibilities on a shared project. Initially, disagreements surfaced in meetings. Over time, communication became hostile — until it stopped altogether. The wider team felt the tension; collaboration slowed, morale dropped. The manager tried to step in, encouraging the employees to "work it out themselves," but this didn't address the core issues. Instead, tensions escalated further.

### **What Was Done**

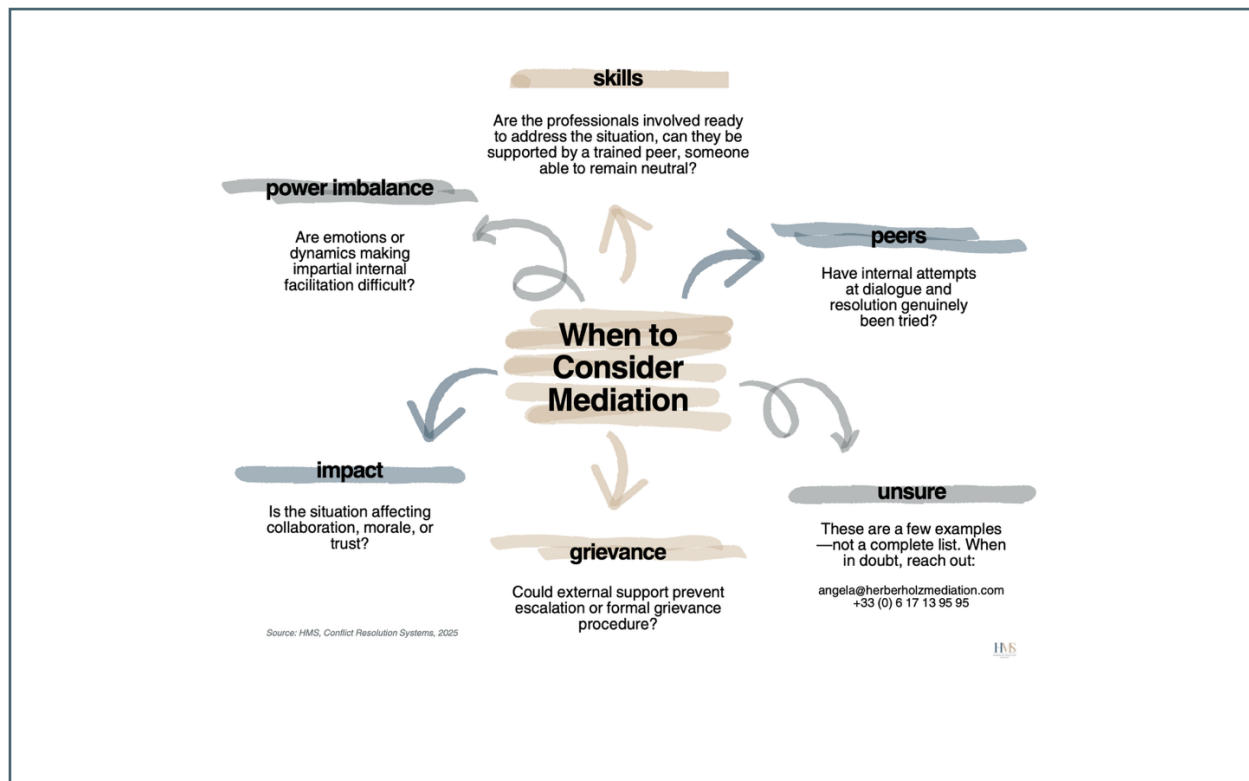
- The manager spoke informally with both employees, then informed HR.
- HR did an informal assessment and recognised internal efforts were exhausted.
- A professional external mediator was engaged.
- The mediator conducted confidential pre-meetings, facilitated structured dialogue, and helped the colleagues rebuild understanding.
- A team-building initiative focusing on conflict prevention and communication was organised to address the wider team's experience of the tension.
- An 10-week follow-up session to ensure progress was sustained, agreed upon processes reviewed and adapted where needed.

### **What Changed**

- Communication channels reopened.
- The wider team reported improved atmosphere and productivity.
- The employees developed new tools for direct, respectful dialogue.
- The manager had guidance at key moments, supported by the on-call mediator to handle early steps before processes were launched.
- The organisation integrated on-call mediation into their HR toolbox for future cases.

### **Common Pitfalls to Avoid**

- Waiting too long to act, hoping the issue will resolve itself.
- Assigning resolution entirely to the employees without adequate support.
- Assuming formal complaints are the only indicator mediation is needed.
- Failing to address the team-wide impact of individual tensions.
- Overlooking follow-up and learning after the intervention.



## VI) 2. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

### Prioritising leadership capabilities

Workplace conflict is inevitable—but dysfunction doesn't have to be.

Too often, disagreements hide beneath the surface until they spill over, affecting collaboration, productivity, and well-being. The real challenge? Many professionals haven't been equipped with the tools to address tension early, constructively, and confidently.

That's where structured Conflict Management training comes in.

Rather than avoiding conflict or reacting impulsively, participants are empowered to step in early on—before stress escalates or relationships fray. Designed for managers, team leads, and HR professionals, these workshops can cultivate essential soft skills to engage in meaningful, respectful dialogue even in high-pressure moments.

### WHAT IT IS

Conflict Management workshops can empower teams to:

- Communicate effectively when stakes are high or emotions are strong.
- De-escalate tension and redirect energy toward constructive outcomes.
- Understand the roots of conflict to prevent recurring patterns.
- Respond—not react—to interpersonal friction with self-awareness and skill.
- Contribute to a healthy, safe and resilient workplace culture.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Building confidence in conflict situations is not just a leadership skill—it's a cultural investment.

When employees know how to navigate disagreement well, organisations benefit from collaboration, reduced stress, and fewer formal grievances. **It's about making space for disagreement without disruption**—and creating a foundation where people feel heard, valued, and supported.



Our 2025 survey highlighted this need: 46% of leaders responsible for addressing tension said they had never been trained to do so sustainably—yet those with training reported significantly better outcomes when engaging in interpersonal conflict.

## HOW IT WORKS

Offered as customizable in-house sessions or off-site workshops, these trainings use interactive exercises and real-life scenarios to strengthen communication. They are an effective tool for conflict prevention and management—whether delivered as stand-alone sessions or integrated into team-building initiatives.

## CROSS-INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Sciences Po (Paris Institute of Political Studies) will train all employees in conflict prevention and management as part of their 2025 development plan. Fresenius (German pharmaceutical group) provides targeted conflict management support for its works council, drawing on external facilitation to strengthen dialogue and collaboration.

### Fabian Zenner - Chair of the Works Council - Fresenius

“As a newly elected works council, we chose to bring in a professional mediator and facilitator to support us in aligning perspectives and strengthening our collaboration. The practical approach and professional guidance that HMS offered had a lasting, positive impact on our teamwork.”



## **BEST PRACTICE**

### **What Happened**

A team member felt increasingly frustrated by project conflicts but didn't feel safe asking their manager for help. "I'd rather leave the company than raise it — I didn't want to be seen as the problem," they later said. The manager recognised a pattern: conflicts weren't surfaced until they became serious.

### **What Was Done**

Three-part upskilling journey was developed for the entire team. The workshops were interactive, practical, and aligned with the participant's workplace challenges.

- Conflict Prevention: spotting tension early and deescalating interpersonal differences
- Conflict Management: addressing issues pro-actively
- Resolution: guiding difficult conversations effectively

In addition, the manager had 9 months of on-call mediation support — putting in place guidance where needed.

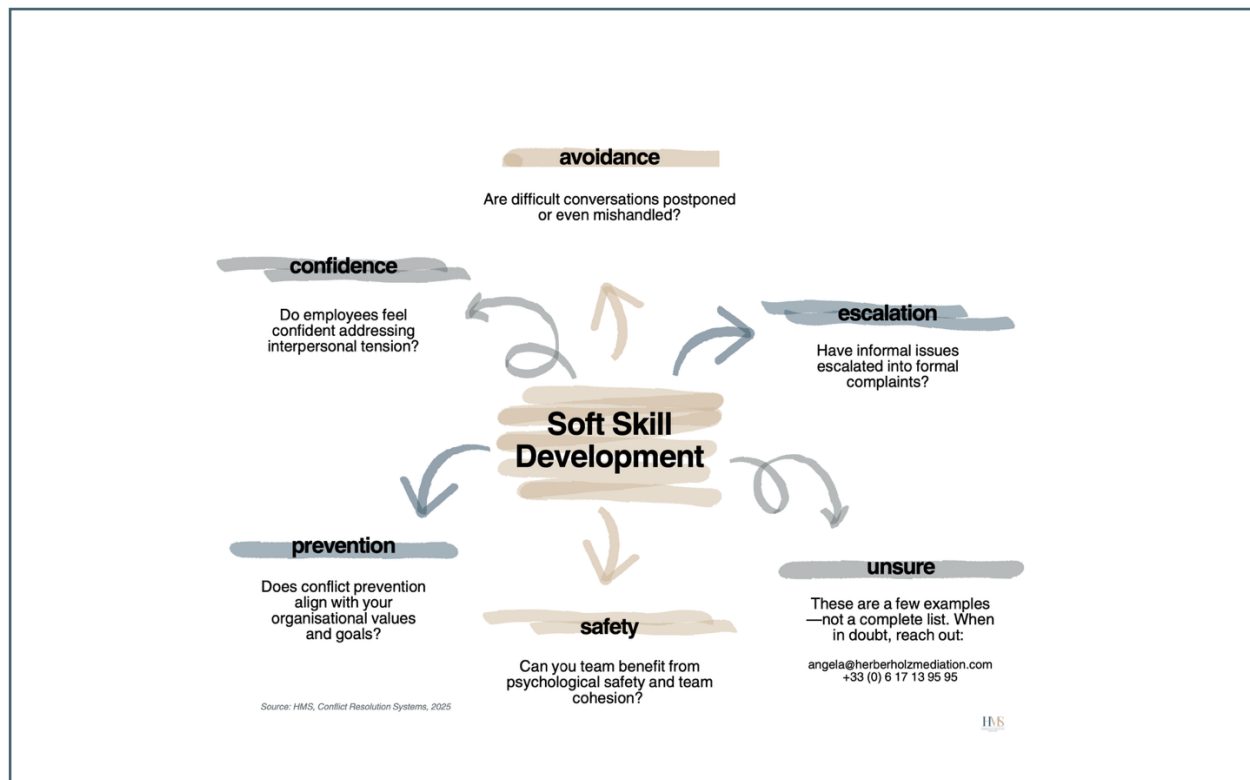
Where the organisation reached their limit, the on-call mediator provided practical guidance on handling early steps before escalation.

### **What Changed**

- Team members felt safer to speak up.
- The manager engaged early.
- Friction was addressed before it disrupted collaboration.
- The manager became a trusted pillar for facilitated dialogue within the team.

### **Common Pitfalls to Avoid**

- Treating conflict management soft skills as "optional" rather than essential.
- Delivering one-off training without follow-up support.
- Failing to align training with real-world challenges teams face.
- Overlooking the need for role modelling by senior leaders.



## VI) 3. HOLISTIC WORKPLACE SAFETY

### Why modern workplace safety must go beyond compliance.

Workplace safety is not just about fire drills and ergonomics. As expectations of healthy work environments get louder, organisations are rethinking what it really means to keep their people safe.

Holistic Workplace Safety (HWS)—a broader, people-centred approach that recognises psychological, emotional, and relational safety as essential to sustainable performance and wellbeing.

HWS can complement traditional health and safety protocols with values-led practices that protect not only bodies, but minds, morale, and relationships.

The following concept has been developed in partnership with **Faiza Alleg Dolivet**, international lawyer and fellow mediator.

### WHAT IT IS

HWS integrates five key dimensions of workplace wellbeing:

- **Psychological Safety:** Employees feel safe to speak up, share concerns, and express ideas without fear of blame or retribution.

- **Emotional Safety:** Emotions and interpersonal tension are handled with empathy, not avoidance—reducing stress and deepening trust.
- **Relational Safety:** Diverse viewpoints are welcomed and valued, not just tolerated. Disagreement doesn't threaten belonging.
- **Intellectual Safety:** People are free to innovate, fail, and learn—encouraging continuous improvement without fear of embarrassment.
- **Inclusion Safety:** Everyone has equitable access to opportunity, recognition, and decision-making.

## WHY IT MATTERS

HWS builds resilient teams and allows a speak-up culture. By creating space for trust, empathy, and dialogue, organisations can:

- Boost retention and reduce stress-related absenteeism.
- Prevent toxic dynamics before they escalate.
- Strengthen psychological and emotional resilience across teams.
- Reinforce company values with visible, people-first practices.



Our 2025 survey confirms: respondents who reported clear structures for psychological and relational safety spend less time on managing workplace tension.

## HOW IT WORKS

HWS is built into existing health and safety protocols — not layered on top. It aligns with the organisation's culture, operations, and values.

## EXAMPLES OF HWS INTEGRATION

- Add focused training to leadership development.
- Expand health & safety committees to include diverse voices.
- Treat conflict as a shared responsibility, not a private matter.
- Build feedback structures that promote respect, not fear.
- Offer facilitation resources for sensitive conversations and transitions.

As someone deeply engaged in shaping psychologically safe and inclusive workplaces, we help teams move from policy to practice through frameworks that prioritise human connection.

If you're curious about integrating holistic safety into your existing structures, we are always open to a conversation.



## **BEST PRACTICE**

### **What Happened**

A team with well structured meetings still struggled to openly address differences. Employees worried that voicing concerns would label them as “difficult” or risk career consequences. Over time, small frustrations quietly undermined trust and collaboration.

### **What Was Done**

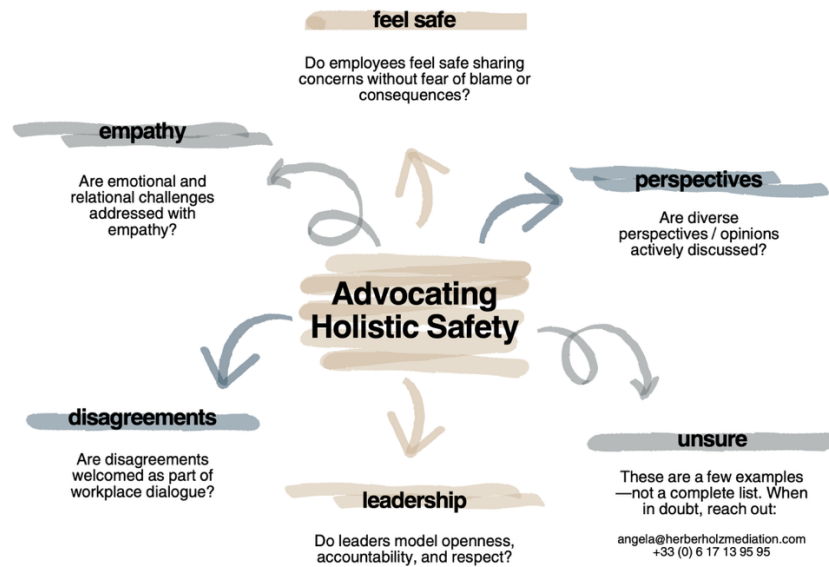
- Leadership introduced a HWS initiative with a focus on psychological, emotional, and relational safety.
- A professional conflict expert enhanced the process, helping the team create a practical framework tailored to their culture.
- Team voices were included in regular feedback structures.
- Leaders modelled openness by sharing their own learning moments and encouraging respectful dissent.
- Health & safety committees integrated relational safety as part of their remit.

### **What Changed**

- People spoke up earlier about concerns.
- Team trust and morale improved.
- Innovation increased as diverse ideas were more openly shared.
- The company reinforced its values of inclusion and respect in practice.

### **Common Pitfalls**

- Treating Holistic Workplace Safety only as compliance matter.
- Assuming psychological safety will emerge naturally without active cultivation.
- Focusing only on policies, without embedding safety in daily practices.
- Overlooking the role of leaders in modelling safety.
- Neglecting to gather and act on feedback.



Source: HMS, Conflict Resolution Systems, 2025





## VII) THE COST OF CONVERSATIONS THAT NEVER HAPPEN

Across sectors, the data — and experience — are clear: unspoken tensions carry hidden costs. Time lost. Energy drains. Trust erodes. And problematic workplace culture shapes in silence.

Many team leaders were never given the opportunity to formerly enhance their conflict resolution skills. Yet they're often expected to navigate interpersonal tension instinctively — without clear frameworks and without the support of transparent, trusted processes. So when interpersonal friction arises, they hesitate. They avoid. They wait for things to settle.

But when someone does not know how to move forward, that someone often does not move at all.

And so — like an iceberg — what is visible at the surface of a disagreement is just a fraction of the story. Beneath lie frustration, uncertainty, and disconnection. Left unaddressed, these situations start to shape workplace culture in ways no one intended.



The opportunity lies in changing this narrative. It starts with building a culture of dialogue — not by solving every conflict or eliminating disagreement, but by creating safe, supported spaces for real conversation to happen before damage occurs.

It's not about grand programmes. It's about everyday clarity:

- Managers who know when and how to step in.
- Employees who feel safe to speak up — and know who to turn to.
- Leaders who are not just allowed but encouraged to ask for facilitation support.

Because no strategy, no policy, no skill training can replace the conversations that never happen.

In this handbook, we identified the gaps within traditional grievance processes. We've seen what support systems work and how to put them in place. And we've shared examples of how organisations across industries embrace moving from silence to structured, proactive conflict prevention and management.

The question is: is your team reaching it's full potential?

Recognising these opportunities and actively working to strengthen your team's ability to navigate differences isn't just a good start — it's a powerful move toward lasting impact and real progress. That awareness is exactly where independent support, facilitation, and leadership development can make a real difference.

It's not about perfection — it's about progress. **One conversation at a time.**

Allow this handbook to spark new possibilities and count on us as your trusted sounding board.



## VIII) APPENDIX

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### 1) DEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS

This survey gathered insights from over 100 experienced professionals across the business events industry, with over 50% in senior or executive roles, the majority representing large or mid-sized organisations, and more than half having over a decade of experience at their current employer.

Here is an overview of the respondent profile:

#### GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION

Insights were shared across the globe, with representation from:

- **Europe** (~40%)
- **Americas** (~25%)
- **Asia-Pacific** (~20%)
- **Africa** (~8%)
- **Middle East** (~7%)
- **Latin America** and other regions were also present, contributing to a balanced international sample.

#### ORGANISATION TYPE

Respondents represented a wide range of organisation types:

- Venues and Venue & Organiser hybrids formed the largest group.
- Strong representation from Organisers, Associations, and Service Partners.
- Other voices included those from Government, Media, Exhibitor/Participants, and Consultancies, providing additional perspectives.

#### COMPANY SIZE

The survey attracted responses from organisations of all sizes:

- Around 40% came from large organisations (**250+ employees**).
- Approximately 40% from medium-sized organisations (**50–249 employees**).
- The remainder represented small organisations (**1–49 employees**), ensuring a broad spectrum of views across different scales of operation.

#### LENGTH OF SERVICE AT CURRENT ORGANISATION

- A notable proportion of respondents (**over 50%**) had been with their current organisations for more than **10 years**, bringing seasoned insights.
- The rest were spread evenly across **1 to 10 years of service**, with a few newer entrants (**less than 1 year**).

## FUNCTIONAL LEVEL

The sample was strongly weighted toward senior decision-makers:

- Over 50% were at **Executive / C-level** or **Senior-level** (senior managers, department heads, directors).
- A smaller share represented **mid-level professionals** and **business owners/self-employed**, ensuring insights from both strategic and operational perspectives.

## AGE DISTRIBUTION

The age profile reflected an experienced respondent pool:

- The majority were aged **45–54** or **older than 55**.
- Significant representation from the **35–44** age group.
- A smaller number of younger professionals aged **25–34** also contributed to the survey.

## 2) ADDITIONAL RESSOURCES

**HERBERHOLZ MEDIATION SERVICES** - [Newsletter](#).

**Bridging the Gap**, Workplace Conflict Resolution and Global Business Events - [HMS 2023 Survey & Handbook](#)).

**Uniting Generations**: How to Prevent and Resolve Intergenerational Conflict at Work - IÉSEG Insights - An article by Calliope Sudborough (IÉSEG) and Angela HERBERHOLZ. (2025). [ENG](#) / [FR](#)

**Perspektive Mediation** - Konflikte? Gibt es nicht. - Franziska Müller Tiberini / German Grüniger / Angela Herberholz / Philippe Fleury / Karin Frei - [Heft 2, Juli 2025, Band 22](#).

**Resolving Conflict Efficiently** - ExhiBits - Article [available here](#). (2023).

**HumanKind Bridging Dialogues** - [Podcast](#) - Faiza Alleg Dolivet.