



"Take a seat on the dialogue-bench" ©Ann Fagerdal

Ann Fagerdal & Transformative Mediation

IDA KROMANN – HUMAN SECURITY MASTER'S STUDENT
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Ann Fagerdal, a seasoned professional with over 25 years of experience in leadership, management, and organizational development, is now taking on transformative mediation. As transformative mediation is a relatively uncharted territory within the Danish mediation communities, Aarhus Centre for Conflict Management (Aarcon) has invited Ann to speak about her experiences at the upcoming Aarcon Winter Conference. In this article, we explore Ann's professional background, her approach to transformative mediation, and the model's value in contemporary conflict management.

Ann Fagerdal was initially trained in accounting, but professional positions in leadership, HR, and management quickly sparked her interest. Ann found she had talent and a passion for fostering cooperation and resolving conflicts. These were skills she developed at the early onset of her career when she, among other things, contributed to the establishment of a major conference & holiday resort formerly known as Søhøjlandet, but today operating under the name Feriepark Landal Søhøjlandet. Here, Ann encountered the challenges and substantial conflicts involved in building organisations. These experiences became the foundation for her future work on mediation and conflict management.

“ I’m no expert. I would like to emphasise this. I am here to learn and share my experience.



Ann Fagerdall, photo by Søren Kjeldgaard.

Continuing her career, Ann took on a role in the executive secretariat for Herman Salling, and later as an HR-business partner at the Salling Group. Here she gained insights into the power of collective decision-making and its potential for driving substantial change.

Later as a consultant for UKON (formerly Udviklingskonsulenterne), she specialized in conflict resolution, particularly addressing complex disputes and facilitating “the difficult conversation”. Ann’s diverse background, and her role as a special consultant in leadership at Region Syddanmark, further enriched her expertise in conflict resolution.

THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

“The difficult conversation” or “Den svære samtale” is a Danish phrase commonly used by professionals within fields of leadership. The origin of the phrase is uncertain, but generally, the phrase refers to discussions that are challenging, sensitive, or potentially conflict-ridden. These conversations may involve topics that evoke intense emotions, require deep communication, or involve the discussion of controversial issues.

Ann Fagerdal prefers calling it “The important conversation” or “Den vigtige samtale”.

Ann now works both as a mediator and facilitator for EGN (Executive Global Network) operating within leadership-focused networking groups as well as in her own consultant company [Friis & Fagerdal](#). Here, she and her colleague Bjarne Friis Pedersen foster workplace welfare and leadership development through conflict resolution training. Specifically working with the empowerment of leaders, optimizing their conflict resolution capabilities, so they themselves can become mediators of “the difficult conversation”.

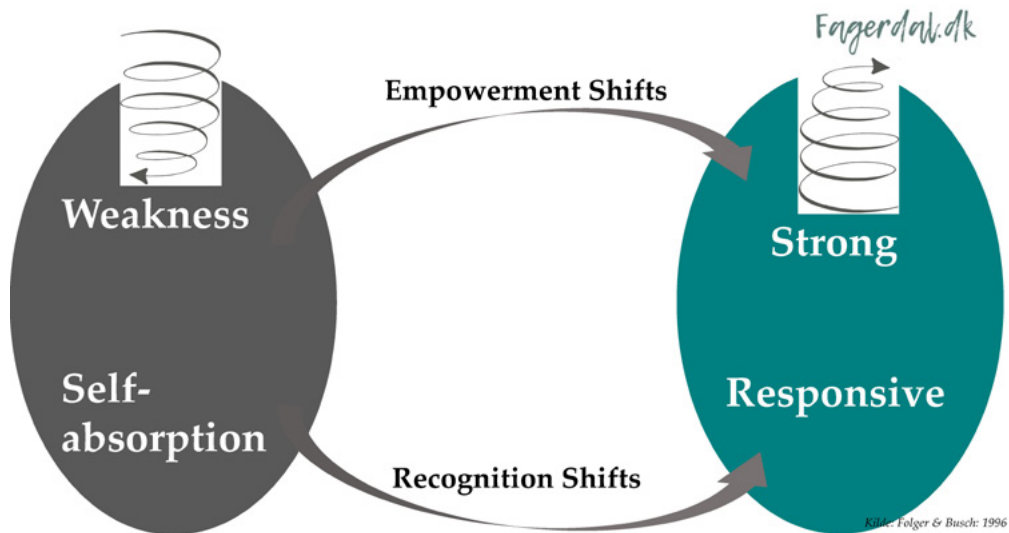
Ann’s Journey into Transformative Mediation

Ann’s entry into the world of transformative mediation shows her hands-on, practical approach to learning as it combines formal education, self-organized training, and active participation in transformative mediation courses.

When talking about her background, she tells me that she has taken two basic modules on conflict transformation, one of which was at the [Center for konfliktløsning](#). While these modules represent her initial foray into formal conflict resolution education, most of Ann’s knowledge comes from professional experience. It stems from her undying curiosity and drive to better herself and the world around her. She stated: “I’ve always been interested in it [conflict mediation], so I’ve chosen to create my own training groups.” Over eight years, she organized regular meetings with a group of like-minded professionals to train and hone their mediation skills. The group was taught by a facilitator with multiple years of mediation experience. Additionally, she has recently become the first certified transformative mediator in Scandinavia after completing virtual transformative mediation trainings at the [Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation](#) (ISCT) located in The United States of America, home to the transformative mediation tradition (Bush & Folger 1994).

What is Transformative Mediation?

Transformative mediation is a conflict resolution model that empowers parties to discover their own solutions, rebuild relationships, and gain deeper insights into each other’s perspectives. It centres on the parties’ choices, voices, and transforming communication. To give us a preview of what Transformative Mediation is about, Ann created an illustration and a hallmark describing the essentials of what both the model and approach are about.



This model views conflict as an opportunity for personal growth, self-determination, and relationship enhancement. It acknowledges that individuals often become “weak” and “self-absorbed” during conflicts. The mediator’s role is to help the parties to become “stronger” and more “responsive” to others. “It’s the parties’ conversation – and they choose how they will have the conversation” Ann highlighted the shift from “self-absorbed” to “responsive” as fundamental. Parties are encouraged to take control of their conversations, topics, and manner of engaging in discussions.

10 Hallmarks Transformative Practice

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1. Mediators role is based on empowerment and recognition
2. It's ultimately the parties 'choice' (leaving responsibility for outcomes with the parties)
3. The parties know best
4. The parties have what it takes (optimistic view)
5. There are facts in the feelings
6. Clarity emerges from confusion
7. The action is 'in the room'
8. Discussing the Past has value to the present
9. Conflict can be a long-term affair
10. Small steps count

Kilde: Folger & Busch: 1996

The Transformative mediation model is distinguishable from other models where mediators more actively guiding conversations via questions and suggestions. In transformative mediation, mediators offer support but refrain from steering parties toward specific solutions. Instead, the most central thing mediators focus on is “reflection” and “summary” to help parties gain insights and make choices.

Why Transformative Mediation Matters

According to Ann, the model's unique value lies in empowering individuals by promoting self-awareness, constructive communication, active listening, and decision-making.

Ann's passion for this approach is rooted in the belief that understanding the value of conflict resolution is crucial. She notes that: "Many companies simply don't have the awareness yet of the potential of mediation - its value and effect as a tool".

“ We need to create awareness of how powerful a tool mediation really is.

She does, however, recognize that not everyone is comfortable talking about conflict. Therefore, in her commitment to making the concept more accessible and appealing, especially to those who might hesitate to seek assistance under the label of "conflict resolution", Ann works with alternative phrasing such as "relational conflicting". "I don't care what it's called as long as it works", Ann remarked with the warmest of smiles.

Friis & Fagerdal's commitment to the empowerment of leaders as mediators of change has proven truly helpful in enhancing workplace harmony and overall well-being. "We see a huge effect when we train and work with leaders. [...] But it is in the overall welfare, where it is reflected the most."

Ann's journey is an inspiring testament to a curious mind and the willingness to embrace every challenge as an opportunity for learning and growth. This reminds us that conflict resolution is not just about solving problems; it is about building bridges, strengthening relationships, and driving positive change.

Bibliography

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About the author

Ida Lindskrog Kromann is a Human Security master's student with a bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Aarhus University. She is currently interning at Aarcon whilst doing her thesis research. Specifically looking at de-escalation and communication tactics used by persons in unbalanced power dynamics to lessen the danger of conflicts.

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