



Forest near Viborg. Photo by Anne Rebsdorf.

## **A Journey in Mediation with Anne Rebsdorf**

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Anne Rebsdorf started her praxis as a mediator in 2010, leaving behind a career in engineering. Alongside mediation, she holds training sessions in conflict resolution for companies, municipalities, schools, housing associations and other organisations. We, at the Aarcon Centre for Conflict Management (Aarcon) invited her to hold our 2024 Winter Workshop revolving around practical conflict management. This article explores Anne's journey with mediation and how the field has changed over the last decade, based on her personal insights she shared with us.



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Anne Rebsdorf.  
Photo by Nicolai Perjesi.

Anne used to work for the Danish Coastal Authority as an engineer. “The cases I worked with were filled with conflict between the municipalities, authorities and landowners. I think that’s where my interest in mediation started because I thought we didn’t do well in solving these conflicts. I wanted to be better at doing that and do it in a more satisfying way. So that’s why I started my education.” She adds that, while coastal protection is becoming increasingly important in the face of climate change, she thrives better as a mediator. “They have very different impacts on people. In mediation it’s very direct. Doing the job as an engineer is more indirect. I’m much happier being in contact with people than I am sitting in front of a computer doing technical reports and coastal analysis. It’s more meaningful for me.” While Anne is involved with various types of conflicts, she finds family disputes to be the most touching. The two cases she is most proud of are: when she helped two parents reconcile with their adult children, and when she aided a couple of estranged sisters to reconnect with each other: “You can find another colleague, but you can’t just find another daughter or another father.” Anne finished her studies as a psychotherapist in 2007 and started her training as a mediator. In 2017 she joined the Center for Konfliktløsning. “It took about 10 years from when I started my new education until I finally became a full-time worker in the consulting and mediation business.”

She cites gaining enough practical experience in mediation as one of the main challenges she faced on her way to become a professional mediator. As the Center for Konfliktløsning is now well established, they have plenty of clients, which helps their mediators gain proficiency hands-on. Something mediators need to study throughout their whole life is their own conflict patterns, Anne believes. “First, you need to learn to handle conflicts yourself before you can start to help others in conflict.” A mediator must also be able to keep their composure during facilitation and try spread their calmness onto their clients too, Anne says. Keeping in mind, that as a mediator you

are not responsible for the solution itself is also very important. “I can offer help to the process, but they have the responsibility to solve it.” However, Anne too tried to take on that responsibility at the beginning of her career. Now, she stresses that not every case can end in an ideal way, but agreeing on parting ways is still a better outcome than keeping on with “spewing and slamming the door and blaming.”

## Changing Trends

According to Anne, they’ve been getting more and more requests for mediation over the years at the Center. “Demand for mediation is growing, especially for more complicated mediation processes where you have more people involved. For instance, group conflicts where you have a department where cooperation isn’t working.” Companies becoming more aware of the mental health of their workers is another trend Anne has seen emerging. She thinks the main drive behind this is that employers realised that a less stressful work environment leads to higher staff retention and fewer sick leaves. Online and hybrid work during the COVID-19 pandemic however led to more conflicts. “You can’t interpret the body language, misunderstanding is easier.”

An interesting aspect of her work is seeing how changes in technology have been shaping human relationships. “One of the things I hear often, which of course has changed over the last 10 years, is all this writing we do through social media or text messages. People write more to each other, and they take what has been written very much as static. It gets very locked because



Mediator training at *the Center for Konfliktløsning*. Photo by Nicolai Perjesi.

people are like *oh, you wrote this to me, this must be the truth that does not change*. Many times, I say to people, if you feel something, and there is even a little bit of possibility of tension, don't write. Talk. Talk to each other, don't write about it."

Anne thinks still not enough people know about mediation or consider it a viable solution; others fear the process might hurt them. "It takes a lot of courage to go into the mediation room. A lot of the conflicts I'm involved with have been running for years before people are doing anything about them." These conflicts present both dangers but also possibilities regarding finding new solutions. "I tell people that everybody has conflicts. The goal is not to not have them. It is to become better at handling them."

Mediators, such as Anne, need to be aware of changing trends in society – be it new modes of communication or new tendencies in corporate policy – to perform their role effectively. Building on this, they must continuously adapt their approach to mediation and broaden their understanding of their clients to address the evolving needs they face in the mediation room.



**About the author**

Domonkos Varga is a master's student in Human Security at Aarhus University. As the Aarhus Centre for Conflict Management's intern in the 2024 fall semester, he delved into the topic of conflict mediation and restorative justice in Denmark and Hungary.

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