

CASE STUDY:

MEDIATION & EARLY RESOLUTION



Founded in 2002, EDF Energy is a British integrated energy company and Britain's biggest generator of zero carbon electricity, supplying homes and business throughout the UK.

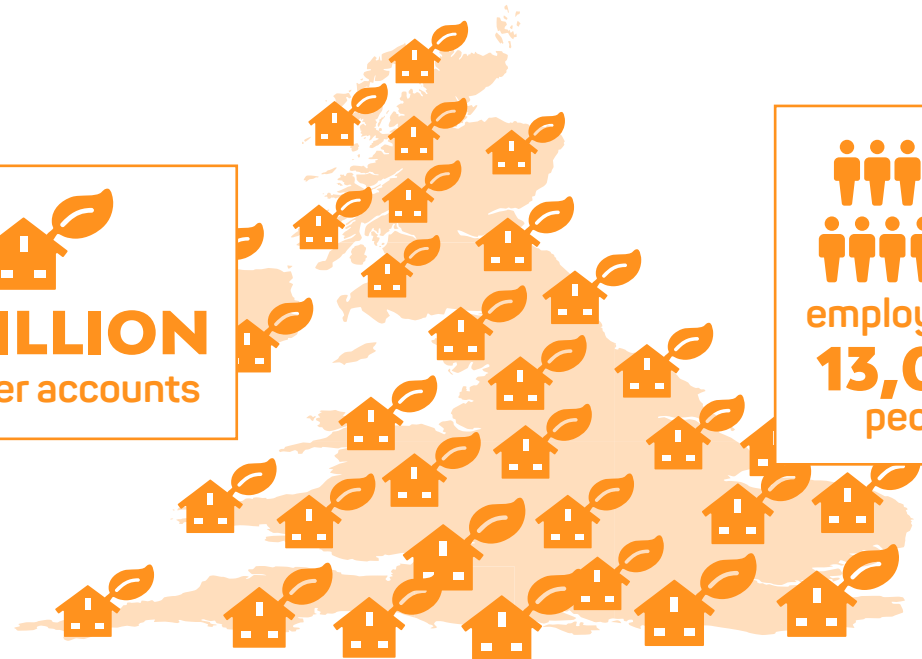
To date, EDF employs over 13,000 people and manages 5.7 million customer accounts.



5.7MILLION
customer accounts



employs over
13,000
people



Targeting issues

With the legacy of being a public sector organisation before nationalisation, EDF Energy has a variety of collective agreements from various sources in the business. Due to the size and nature of the organisation, these agreements are rigid: processes like disciplinary and grievance have clear guidelines and are subject to agreement with trade unions. This helps to give employees transparent expectations and processes, but it also has its negatives. Rigid structures are often time consuming and inefficient with a lack of flexibility and constructive solutions, focusing less on emotional fall-out and more on data and business success. EDF were looking to adapt and enhance their existing grievance procedures by introducing a bespoke mediation and early resolution system to allow for a more person-centred perspective. A blending of the two would provide a fuller resolution approach to all workplace disputes.

“Typical grievance procedures don’t allow for a proper understanding of what the individual is looking for and what would resolve the situation as far as they are concerned. Because they tend to focus on facts, it’s almost treated like a legal process. We found that most conflicts are not as clear-cut as that.”

MELODY BELL, EMPLOYEE RELATIONS CONSULTANT AT EDF ENERGY

EDF also found that formal grievance processes were misaligned with their health and safety ethics of a zero-harm policy. The act of raising a grievance, or having a grievance raised against you, causes a high stress and emotional impact.



Making resolutions

Due to company and stakeholder reservations about moving out of a structured formal process, EDF first piloted a mediation and early resolution programme across the Customer Space. It was felt across the board that The TCM Group had an exceptional level of experience and were therefore found to be a perfect fit for EDF Energy, understanding the business and culture at EDF Energy amongst all other competitors.

EDF Energy, with guidance and partnership from TCM, integrated a multi-disciplinary team of mediators with a focus on being fully independent and impartial. A mediator competency framework was developed to set out the skill set required:

- 1 Be empathetic.
- 2 Remain impartial.
- 3 Be calm and reassuring.
- 4 Build rapport quickly and facilitate a safe space.
- 5 Stick to and understand boundaries.



"Where we use mediation and early resolution most effectively is to rebuild relationships in relation to issues such as miscommunication, a lack of training or guidance or misunderstandings about the other person's intentions. Mediation is not about finding someone at fault; it's about two people understanding each other better and agreeing steps to prevent the situation occurring again."

Mediators were trained through an intensive and thorough six-day Open College Network (OCN) accredited course. Delegates completed portfolios and delivered assessed role plays as part of the accreditation.

Impacting culture

TCM's piloted early resolution and mediation programme received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants.

"Ultimately, it's about them resolving their own issues, of course, and self-determination of mediation is so fundamental. The driver for us was to supplement what we already had to make it a better experience for everybody. There are numerous occasions where we've achieved that objective, when people have navigated their way through the experience and they had a better outcome as a result. Plus, we have saved the business money by getting people back to work faster and intervening so that processes don't escalate. Our pilot did demonstrate that there is a place for mediation and early resolution in amongst our processes and practices."

The next stage of transforming workplace culture is to roll out the mediation training to HR advisors and regional casework advisors. These people are best placed to facilitate coaching and confident conversations in mediation processes.



Looking forward

EDF Energy recognises the importance of open dialogue and emotional support for employees, and that mediation facilitates these behaviours through its party-led structure. The transition to a mediation framework and mindset is a long game; turning the tide and changing traditional thinking is an ongoing challenge. EDF wants to be clear on how it measures success alongside continuing to build evidence gathering systems from the outset. The main priority is to ensure that employees' voices are heard, and always will be heard, now that early resolution initiatives are in place.

"All people generally want to do is be listened to and heard. The critical thing is to decide whether you're going to choose to listen to the voices of your employees or not. As HR professionals, we need to get much better at giving our employees a space to vocalise their concerns and issues, because that's where your issues are going to come from."



If you would like more information on how your organisation can benefit from mediation training, call today and speak to a member of the team.



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