

“Coming Home”: A Study on the Effects of Mediation Training in Two Master’s Programmes in Denmark and Germany

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For this blogpost I interviewed Lin Adrian, associate professor of mediation and director of the master’s in Mediation and Conflict Resolution at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Together with the master’s in Mediation and Conflict Management at the Viadrina European University in Frankfurt / Oder Germany, Lin conducted an empirical study on the effects of mediation training on graduates’ professional and personal lives.

Both programmes are two-year master’s with very extensive practical mediation training and academic study aimed at professionals from very different walks of life. The goal of the research project, Lin said, was to get beyond anecdotal evidence on the positive effects of mediation training, and to gain empirical results on what these effects more specifically are.

Greg Bond: Tell me about the research? How was it conducted and what were you asking?

Lin Adrian: We sent surveys to graduates from both programmes, in Danish and German, asking as to the effects of the mediation master’s in professional and personal life. We included questions with scalable answers and the possibility to add free text. In all we received more than 250 responses, which were anonymous.

Greg Bond: Who does the master’s programmes, and why?

Lin Adrian: People from many different professions, from the private and public sectors, and self-employed. People who work in management and leadership, judges and lawyers, social and health workers, consultants, and many more. They are aged from their mid-twenties to their seventies, and most are mid-career, so in their forties. They are not taking these programmes to become full-time mediators, nor just to add mediation to legal services they may otherwise provide. The results showed that more than 80% decided to do the master’s programmes for reasons of personal and / or professional development.

Greg Bond: What were the main findings and were there any surprises?

Lin Adrian: Firstly, these master’s programmes are facilitating personal and professional growth, so going beyond the usual remit of academic study in teaching knowledge and skills. They are life-changing and career-changing. We knew this, but the extent of it still surprised me. Respondents said that their training and studies had enhanced their personal and professional well-being. What also surprised me was the large number of respondents who spread the word about mediation and conflict management, in presentations and publications, or as promoters within their own organisations. Our graduates also maintain significant professional networks and friendships with each other, and this is not always the case when people do training mid-career.

Greg Bond: Can you say a bit more about how people experienced transformation - something life-changing?

Lin Adrian: This is about better alignment between personal values and well-being and professional contexts. Graduates feel more “in sync” with who they are and what they are doing. They are more relaxed about conflict at work and in their private lives, not simply because they have gained specific skills, but due a sense of “coming home,” being more in touch with themselves and their core values. The extent of this increased well-being did surprise me, but the findings clearly show it.

Greg Bond: I myself am a graduate of the German programme in Frankfurt, and I can certainly confirm that doing this master’s set me on a path that enabled me to redefine my career and my approach to conflict. This did not happen all at once, as if doing the master’s was like ticking a box. Is there any data to suggest that it takes time and requires further work to make the effects of mediation training sustainable?

Lin Adrian: We did not ask questions that speak to this in our survey, but I think that you are very right. Sustainable change takes time. For some, taking the masters is a stop on their way while for others it is the starting point for a new direction. For both groups, however, the programme becomes part of a path that continues. I hear that from former students and, speaking for myself, working with mediation and conflict is a life-long learning process.

Greg Bond: Can your results be relevant more generally to mediation training, or do you think they are specific to the two master’s programmes?

Lin Adrian: Both. Of course, we only have data from our graduates. And the two master’s are two-year programmes with in-depth training, self-reflection and academic study. I do think that shorter mediation training can also lead to personal change and better alignment between what people do professionally and their own well-being. But there is probably more opportunity for depth in this transformation with the longer programmes.

Greg Bond: Were there any negative effects of the training, or were all the responses so positive?

Lin Adrian: Mainly positive. Some respondents mentioned frustration at not being able to put into practice what they had learned due to constraints in their organisations or reluctance to implement mediation in society at large.

Greg Bond: Will your research lead to changes in the curricula or methods of the two master’s?

Lin Adrian: We are considering more work on disseminating mediation, on how to promote it, as this was clearly something our graduates are doing without our programmes offering any reflection or training on how. We are also thinking about the personal transformation that takes place, and how this fits in with academic study - whether we need to think more about the balance between the two.

Greg Bond: How would you define mediation? Most of your graduates are not working as full-time neutrals in disputes.

Lin Adrian: Mediation is about helping people deal with conflict in ways that are empowering and can lead to good solutions for the disputants themselves and for the broader systems and environments (organisations, business, families, etc.) in which they are involved. The basic principles of mediation are useful in many professional conflict situations. I think the two master’s programmes achieve a mediation approach to conflict on a more general level.

Greg Bond: Where are the results published?

Lin Adrian: There has been an article in the German journal *Zeitschrift für Konfliktmanagement*,^[fn]Ulla Gläßer, Kirsten Schroeter and Lin Adrian: “Was wird durch Mediationsausbildungen bewirkt? – Empirische Befunde und strategische Fragen,” *Zeitschrift für Konfliktmanagement*, 2|2020.^[fn] and presentations at the Dispute Resolution Section of the ABA in 2020 and at IACM in Dublin in 2019. Further print publications are forthcoming.