

Talking Across Generations

An Introduction

Stephen Hawking, the brilliant physicist, author, and cosmologist, once talked about the power of speech. “For millions of years,” he said, “mankind lived just like the animals. Then something happened which unleashed the power of our imagination. We learned to talk and we learned to listen. Speech has allowed the communication of ideas, enabling human beings to work together to build the impossible.”

Hawking’s words are lofty, but we agree. Here at *Dispute Resolution Magazine*, we believe that bringing people together and helping them learn from each other is a central part of our mission. And so we convened four inter-generational groups of dispute resolution professionals to engage in conversations focusing on family dispute resolution, employment mediation, commercial dispute resolution, and international and domestic commercial arbitration.

The groups varied in composition — some involved only two participants, and other groups had three or even four. Some groups met and spoke face-to-face; others shared their insights through the vehicle of more traditional one-on-one interviews. Members of the founding or institutionalizing generations convened three of the groups, and a law student who aspires to be a member of the next generation of dispute resolution convened the fourth. The results do not permit us to draw any empirical conclusions, but all the conversations provided intriguing insights about the continuing appeal (and elusiveness) of

self-determination, changes in people’s introduction to dispute resolution, the struggle between creativity and routinization, the need to do better in achieving diversity among neutrals, and whether dispute resolution should be understood as a “calling” or as a quite natural career move.

We extend special thanks to Margaret Shaw, Wayne Thorpe, Peter Salem, and Adam R. Martin for their willingness to take on the assignment of convening a dialogue, their determination in overcoming the inevitable challenges that arose, and their curiosity, creativity, and thoughtfulness as revealed in their explorations of inter-generational dialogue. Their reports reflect their own distinctive approaches to the task, with two choosing a verbatim record and the others preferring a summary.

In these conversations, we may not be able to build the impossible, as Hawking put it. But the generations have much to learn from each other. We hope that reading these dialogues might inspire you to initiate one or two of your own. Tell us what you learn. We want to know. ■

— **The Dispute
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Editorial Board**