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# *Editor's Note*

We are told that experience is the best teacher. "There are no secrets to success," said former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. "It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure." A negotiation that does not kill us makes us stronger and wiser next time around.

That is a consoling notion, but it is true only if we learn the right lessons. And negotiation can be a wicked learning environment. Even when negotiation is over, we only know part of the story. Our counterparts may have a very different perspective. A strategy or tactic that doomed us this time might actually be successful in another instance, so it is dangerous to draw general principles from a single data point.

That is not to say that we should throw in the towel when it comes to learning from failure, but we do need to be rigorous. Esra Cuhadar and Bruce Dayton are indeed thorough here in their study of track two diplomatic efforts that paralleled the Oslo peace process. The authors inventoried nearly eighty unofficial Israeli-Palestinian projects that took place over a span of twelve years. As well intended as these efforts were, the authors found that there was relatively little cross learning among them. The data that they gathered through interviews and focus groups are an important contribution to knowledge building, not just for the Middle East but also for other parts of the world in which conflict resolution can be promoted outside of formal processes.

In their stimulating report on the state of the art of the last decade of mediation research, James Wall and Timothy Dunne also explore learning on various levels. They look broadly across different contexts and cultures, illuminating both common and distinctive features. They also consider how mediation itself is a process of dynamic learning for both disputants and mediators. The authors offer a cybernetic model of ongoing adjustment and readjustment, as each party responds to the behavior of others.

I wonder if there may be a similar — although much more slowly moving — dynamic in where we locate our research. Those of us who study negotiation endeavor in our various ways to expand knowledge. We do not deliberately set out to reinvent the wheel. Wall and Dunne conclude that recent mediation research has been fruitful in some respects but not others. They say that it has been successful in application, that is, in showing how familiar techniques can be extended to new realms. But all in all, they find less to be cheerful about when it comes to developing new frameworks and understandings. Like the cybernetic cat, maybe it is time to stir ourselves and get back to theory building.

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Mediation and learning from mistakes are also the topics of concern for Giuseppe De Palo and Lauren Keller. In their article, they describe both progress and turmoil as the Italian government, in response to pressure from the European Union, has implemented sweeping new measures to encourage much more extensive use of mediation via a mandatory mediation requirement. The authors identify what they call a “mediation paradox” in Italy: mediation has been quite successful in terms of outcomes for disputants but, until recently, not very widely used, which is reflected in huge case backlogs in Italian courts.

The mandatory mediation decree whose history the authors describe has been largely successful in diverting more cases to mediation but has generated considerable controversy and resistance on the part of Italian lawyers. The authors examine the pros and cons of the new legislation and ask how the Italian government could have better anticipated and managed the opposition to it.

Finally, in this issue, Ian Macduff also considers learning, revisiting a topic he first discussed in the journal three years ago: how to use blogs to improve teaching and learning in negotiation and mediation courses. In his first article, Macduff described how he had introduced blogs into the curricula of the courses he was teaching in New Zealand. He has since moved to Singapore, where he finds that cultural differences are reflected in the ways that students use the blogs as learning tools. Not everything he has tried has been successful and, like his students, he has been forced to adapt and learn from the sort of setbacks that every teacher experiences.

*Michael Wheeler*