

# The Tradecraft Transmission Belt: Transferring Knowledge of Mediation from Practice to Theory, from Theory to Practice, and Back Again

By Chester A. Crocker,

United States Institute of Peace (USIP)<sup>1</sup>

Transfer of knowledge between the theory and practice of mediation can improve effectiveness in mediating the most difficult or intractable of conflicts, but this transfer faces significant hurdles and is not occurring as effectively as necessary to meet the demands of the current environment.

The lack of effective exchange is not predominantly a question of communication between theorists and practitioners (both official and nonofficial actors involved in the mediation effort), because the distinctions between the two have blurred. Scholars practice conflict prevention, management, and resolution, in both nonofficial and official settings, and some of the scholarship on mediation is produced by practitioners and what might be termed scholar-practitioners. Likewise, the problem is not completely explained by a perception that theory and practice are mutually incompatible, the one representing idealistic models isolated from real world, the other a “by the seat of your pants,” case-by-case or anecdotal approach to problem solving. There is wide recognition that the lessons and best practices distilled from previous experience can inform the conduct of future mediation efforts.

Rather, the problem in transferring knowledge from theory to practice and back again lies primarily in the mechanics of the exchange—the “transmission belt” that links a mediation experience to analysis and distillation of lessons learned to professional education and training of the practitioners who will conduct to the next effort and of the next generation of practitioners just entering advanced schools. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and HD Centre’s Oslo Forum 2006 will include a panel to examine this cycle, exploring how well the transmission belt functions and how it could be improved.

As background for that panel, this paper will set out some illustrative examples of the key lessons of “mediation tradecraft” distilled from experience by a team at the U.S. Institute of Peace. (See annex pages 92\_93) These ‘tradecraft’ lessons, it should be emphasized, are a sample or selection from a much wider body of scholarly and practitioner literature, and they are appended to this paper to illustrate the kinds of substantive ‘lessons’ one is considering.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the paper explores some of the current mechanisms for transferring and developing this knowledge between scholars and practitioners, and identifies some of their basic weaknesses and certain obstacles that arise.

---

<sup>1</sup> The author appreciates the contributions of A. Heather Coyne in preparing this paper. For more information on the author, please refer to Section III of this Briefing Pack. More information on USIP can be obtained via [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org).

<sup>2</sup> Useful bibliographies on negotiation and mediation are available in: Victor A. Kremenyuk (ed.), *International Negotiation: Analysis, Approaches, Issues* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002); Paul C. Stern and Daniel Druckman (eds.), *International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C. National Academy Press, 2000), chapters 1-2, 6-8. See also, Jacob Bercovitch (ed.) *Studies in International Mediation; Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Z. Rubin* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

Additional slices of the transmission belt will be considered during the Oslo Forum panel discussions. For instance, are there systems for debriefing mediation staff and parties after a mediation effort concludes that could enhance the distillation process? Are there training and reference tools would improve the placement of those distilled lessons into the minds and hands of practitioners? Discussants will also explore efforts by governments and international organizations to institutionalize the transmission belt.

### The Tradecraft of Mediation

Through its work with students, academics, and practitioners, the U.S. Institute of Peace has attempted to identify what a good education in peacemaking would look like. Although this process is still in early stages, the Institute believes that such an education would stress the following elements:

1. understanding of the sources, nature and patterns of conflict, both in general and as applied to particular situations;
2. ability to think strategically about 3<sup>rd</sup> party political intervention and its consequences as well as about the real risks—political, societal, and personal—of failing to respond;
3. a familiarity with all the players involved in peacemaking and the different roles institutions and individuals can undertake;
4. a strong grasp of negotiation, mediation, and other conflict resolution approaches, and an ability to use these tools;
5. an understanding of key strategic elements such as engagement, timing, and leverage; and
6. a recognition of the complexities of building a sustainable peace.

Scholars have made significant inroads on distilling the elements of tradecraft that organize and inform such analyses. Attached is a chart that illustrates – in highly selective form — certain elements of tradecraft that support each of the analytical requirements above. This material is derived from work conducted at U.S. Institute of Peace, and in particular from a 2004 volume, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*.<sup>3</sup> The chart is intended to illustrate practices and lessons that respond to these substantive categories of knowledge.

### Teaching, Training, and Tools for Practitioners<sup>4</sup>

Turning now to the question of transmission belts or delivery systems, it is clear that the transfer of substantive best practices and lessons remains a relatively underdeveloped field. The obstacles are fairly well known. First, as noted by Alexander George, scholars and practitioners are divided by the different ways they define and use knowledge and by the institutional cultures in which they work. Writing thirteen years ago, George concluded that the policymaking and academic worlds have been

---

<sup>3</sup> Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the Hardest Cases* (Washington, USIP, 2004). This volume was prepared on conjunction with a companion volume of conceptual essays and case studies, edited by these authors and entitled *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict* (Washington: USIP, 2005). A previous volume, also edited by Crocker, Hampson and Aall contains 21 practitioner case studies of complex or multiparty mediation: see, *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World* (Washington, USIP, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> This discussion draws upon Pamela Aall, “Scholars and Peacemakers: The Contribution of Academic/Practitioners to Conflict Management”, *International Studies Perspectives* (2002), 3, p. 145-153 and Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall, “Bridging the Teaching Gap in International Conflict Analysis and Management”, paper presented at 38<sup>th</sup> Annual International Studies Association Convention, Toronto, Canada March 1997.

slow to interact usefully on the role of force and conflict management in the conduct of diplomacy and even slower on conflict avoidance and resolution.<sup>5</sup> The obstacles are varied:

- Most scholars lack practical experience of peacemaking and seek to develop conceptual formulae linked to normative generalizations or typologies derived from quantitative studies for organizing their material. Track one practitioners typically are “conceptually challenged” and lack an instinct for (or an interest in) setting their experience and detailed knowledge of cases and institutions within a broader framework of principles. As a result, the different types of content derived from the output of scholars and practitioners may relate to each other only distantly, as ships passing in the night.
- One answer is to expand the participation of practitioners in training and educational institutions. But this must be done carefully: the practitioner’s direct experience and enthusiasm about those cases, actors and institutions with which he/she is familiar does not automatically translate into effective strategies for training and teaching. There is a risk that loosely connected anecdotes and ‘practitioner insights’ will get marooned as isolated happenings in a conceptual desert. To be effective in transferring knowledge, the practitioner needs help in learning how to train and teach, what materials to use, how case studies and simulations can be used (and their limits), and how to avoid the twin pitfalls of overly abstract generalization and immersion in over-detailed case specifics.
- The cultural and institutional distance between scholars and practitioners takes a number of forms: (i) a reluctance on the part of practitioners to concede a possible need to ‘go back to school’ or get retooled and retrained (the way doctors or lawyers often do) as the field of conflict management and mediation moves along; (ii) a tendency on the part of practitioners to play down book learning as ‘academic’ – a sometimes pejorative term and to be more comfortable with managerial learning tools (‘next slide, please’) or simple briefing memos; (iii) the weakness of many academics in relating to practitioner needs for operational – as distinguished from theoretical or conceptual – findings, lessons that can be linked to a variety of contexts and applied by policymakers and mediators; (iv) the divergent professional vocabularies, teaching tools and materials, and organizing concepts used by the two communities.
- There is another obstacle that flows directly from debates and differences within the conflict resolution and management field. Many conflict resolution scholars define their field of interest in terms of lessons learned and best practices for track two practitioners. Some are themselves scholar-practitioners in track two work. The obstacle that arises, therefore, is between tracks one and two. Attitudes toward official policymakers may range from unfamiliar or detached to explicit distancing or antagonism toward the potential contributions, techniques, and motives of track one mediators. The latter, in turn, may view the track two scholar-practitioners as interference, a complicating presence, or an unrealistic form of trade-craft that attempts to operate in the hard-edged world of power politics on the basis of ‘touchy-feely’ social science nostrums. These sorts of mutual perceptions do not enhance the transmission of knowledge and distilled experience in either direction.

---

<sup>5</sup> Alexander George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C. USIP, 1993).

Fortunately, the state of affairs between the academy and the policy world is gradually changing. Pamela Aall, education director at the US Institute of Peace, attributes this to several factors. Increasingly, scholars get directly involved in practicing conflict prevention, management, and resolution, in both nonofficial and official settings. At the same time, in some cases official organizations are adopting the conflict resolution techniques and educational approaches associated with academic institutions, or in other cases, working in tandem with nonofficial efforts. Reasons for this blurring of roles are varied but reflect two important dynamics in the international system: (1) the nature of conflict has changed from interstate to intrastate since the end of the Cold War, raising a host of challenges for the states involved and for the international community's attempts to prevent or settle a conflict and to effect reconciliation; (2) as a result of these changes, new institutions—official and nonofficial—have sprung into being and existing institutions have changed their mandates in order to respond more effectively to these conflicts. She concludes, 'there are more opportunities to act, more actors, and more experimentation to define appropriate peacemaking practices in these new situations'<sup>6</sup>.

While there is a growing volume of transmission of concepts and ideas from the academy into track two and track one and one-half (non-officials mediating among officials), there are fewer cases of explicit and acknowledged application of theoretical findings and case lessons by track one actors. It would be timely to identify scholar-practitioners from those nations and organizations that play lead roles in mediating international conflicts to explore the extent to which lessons and concepts are flowing – in both directions. The US Institute of Peace has generated a body of materials aimed at capturing and distilling practitioner insights and pulling together scholarly and practitioner thinking about the roots of – and responses to – conflict intractability.<sup>7</sup>

The next challenges will be (a) to expand the pool of rigorously analytical and concise case materials generated from track one experiences so that best practices and lessons can be shared and accessed by a wide range of practitioner institutions; (b) to develop additional knowledge of the interface between the tracks as they work in parallel or sequentially on today's conflicts; and (c) to produce the sorts of training and educational materials that appear most appropriate to different 'consumer' communities. This last challenge requires particular focus on what different consumers require in the educational and training materials they prefer to use. As the Institute of Peace implements its own plans to establish an academy of conflict management and peace building in Washington, it will look forward to sharing information and materials with sister organizations, official and non-official, in other countries.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Aall reference (2002) in note 3 above.

<sup>7</sup> See note 2 above

## Annex

<b>Principles of a Peacemaking Education</b>	<b>Examples of Mediation Tradecraft</b>
Understand sources, nature, and patterns of conflict	<p>Conflict is ripe for intervention and parties ready to negotiate only when situation has reached level of mutually hurting stalemate and is likely to get worse. Hurt and stalemate must be mutual and must be felt by top elites. Analyze how best to shape perceptions, to coach and inform the parties, to warn decision makers and introduce fresh ideas, and to use pressures and inducements that affect the parties' calculus of costs, rewards, fears, and confidence.</p> <p>Understand key watersheds in fighting and peacemaking, major turning points and trends in order to identify what benchmarks have become clearly established in the parties' minds and what building blocks already exist with which to construct the edifice of peace. Judge whether there is a mechanism and a process to work with, whether that process is more help than hindrance, and whether it will be feasible and advantageous to launch an entirely new negotiating initiative. What circumstances have produced gridlock or intractability?</p>
Think strategically about intervention and its consequences, and risks of failing to respond.	Does the intervention have the operational and political capacity for the demands of the task and the leadership responsibilities of running the mediation as well as the strategic and diplomatic capacity to make the mediation a priority and to assemble a coalition of partners. Can the requisite people and skills be made available? Are necessary resources available, including organizational base, information processing, communication with parties and other players, guidance from superiors, decision making, spending authority? Does the institution have a mandate for the conduct of the mediation that effectively shields the process from political interference? Does it have the leadership it will need to make an impact?
Know all the players involved in peacemaking	<p>Know everything about the parties relevant to becoming capable of bringing influence to bear. Consult with wide range of actors while negotiating with narrowest range capable of making the decisions. Ascertain who gains from the struggle, who gains from its end. Understand the balance of power between the parties. Identify what forms of power matter most (military, external diplomatic and political support, financing, legitimacy, soft power resources, manpower/leadership), and assess how are they distributed among the parties. Establish whether there is a clear trend-line in the balance of forces. Is the power relationship dynamic or stable? Whose side is time on and which side appears to be playing a long game? How well informed are the parties about their real positions?</p> <p>Understand how others are likely to react to a fresh mediation initiative, whether there are key interested parties who could thwart or assist the effort, how to broaden the base of the mediation, what leverage other states could bring to the table. Do not cultivate partners and recruit friends of the mediation effort unnecessarily, but broaden base of mediation only if leaving other people out will weaken or undercut its chances and if bringing other people in will bring the benefit of relevant relationships and multilateral leverage.</p>
Grasp and use negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution tools	<p>Change the negotiating agenda, framing issues so as to attract the parties by offering each of them something of value that can only be obtained from the other in the context of a package deal developed through mediation. Review ways of coming up with fresh incentives to attract the parties to a reinvigorated or restructured process of negotiation.</p> <p>Hurting stalemate may exist between the two warring societies but not between their decision-making elites, who feel little internal pressure to settle. Develop initiatives that focus less on the power balance between the sides and more on the balances within each of them.</p> <p>Use the process aggressively to test each side's motives and willingness to consider proposals that would resolve its respective distrust of the other. Use matched, conditional commitments ("yes, if") to define elements of a settlement.</p>

Final document must reflect those commitments in principle that are politically vital to the conflict parties and logically vital to the integrity of the settlement; without a statement, cease-fires tend to collapse. Hammer out a framework of negotiation or a statement or declaration of principles that translates principles or framework into a set of binding commitments in enough detail to satisfy the parties.

Understand key elements such as engagement, timing, and leverage

A new mediation effort offers a window of opportunity. Launch the new mediation effort in a manner that makes an impact on the parties in first phase of consultations. Move them out of their dug-in positions and secure commitment to working within the re-launched peace process. Test parties, place them in new position in which they must make choices to gauge their responses to different ideas and avenues of advance, and to gain a sharper sense of their priorities, fears and political requirements.

At the beginning of a new mediation effort after previous attempts that have stalemated, the parties' current preference is for conflict. Identify sources of leverage available to move the parties from violence to negotiation. Examine support of other states; the stalemate in the conflict itself to persuade parties that there is no military or unilateral solution; bilateral relationships with the mediator; readiness of international resources such as reassurances/external guarantees/intelligence sharing; questions from the mediators; proposed settlement formula that if accepted conditionally offer the basis for obtaining movement from the other; donors who can underwrite the costs of a settlement.

Endgame should conclude in conditions that favor successful implementation. Deconflict timing with other conflicts and peace processes that compete for political capital and resources for peacekeeping and postconflict reconstruction. Avoid scheduling when mediator's home base will be preoccupied with other concerns.

Recognize complexities of building a sustainable peace

Consider whether interim steps create momentum for peace by achieving incremental progress or whether such incrementalism places a burden on the continuity and staying power of leadership and on implementation skills. If the latter, a design is preferable in which individual parts of the package are only implemented after all issues have been agreed on.

Get armed parties to sign agreements that will not only stop the fighting but also create conditions and a momentum that inexorably undercut the parties' political monopoly in the war-torn polity.

Achieving a settlement may hinge on implementation issues: how a settlement will be implemented, who will facilitate/monitor implementation, what the verification measures are, and how to strengthen credibility of commitments. Negotiate guarantees during the period leading up to the settlement to impress the parties and persuade them to take the risks of peace. 1) Provide assurances that third parties pushing the settlement will be there to facilitate implementation. 2) Include provision for the establishment of specific mechanism to assist the parties with coordination, dispute management. 3) Provide for direct, external participation in the implementation process. 4) Incorporate external experts in working groups and commissions that will actually implement aspects of the accords. Natural resource management is an important case: develop resource and revenue sharing to outflank spoilers and encourage cooperation.

Weigh benefit of seeking cease fire early in the endgame against risk. Possible benefits: generates momentum and improves climate for tough decisions; brings costly violence under control. Possible risks: encourages short term thinking and maneuvering to gain advantage; encourages cheating and muscle flexing on both sides; avoids facing tough political questions; procrastination about basics of the settlement allows leaders to avoid explaining shape of final deal to domestic audience which leads to lack of public buy-in and support later. Be aware of motives behind proposals for early movement on cease-fire. A party may be using a ceasefire as a breathing space, or using mediation to restrain the stronger side, etc. Ceasefires tend to last longer when underpinned by a broad sense among the parties that a mutually acceptable framework for negotiation is coming within reach.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12