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# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## Reflections from Scotland on a momentous day

John Sturrock (Core Solutions Group) · Friday, September 19th, 2014

Friends

On this referendum day in Scotland, I am writing this piece without knowing the outcome. By the time most of you read this, our future will be clearer. And by then, whatever the outcome, the work of restoration, healing and moving forward together will have commenced.

Some years ago I worked as a mediator in Malawi with a large group of people who represented several sides in a dispute. We had three days of workshops and negotiations. On the first day, we played what we call The Gain Game. This is a development of The Prisoners' Dilemma, a well-known exercise in game theory. Anyway, the learning is simple. Those who cooperate sensibly tend to achieve more successful outcomes than those who are aggressive and adopt a winner takes all approach.

The Game is played using red and blue cards. The red cards encourage selfish playing and the blue cards are used by those who understand the benefits of collaboration. Of course, they are played in a variety of combinations depending on the actions and reactions of the players. It is often only in retrospect that the players understand that the key to success is to remove the red cards from the game as early as possible. And that such a move itself requires communication, trust and cooperation, whatever has gone before. But setting aside the baggage of the past can be difficult for some, especially when the game is set up with incentives to encourage defection from cooperation.

In Malawi, on the third day, the participants decided that they would ceremoniously place their red cards in a place where they could be seen by all and used by none. This was a symbol of giving up the opportunity to requite the other. It was a symbol of willingness to work together, whatever the consequences or the outcome. It was a moment full of meaning and acceptance. There was acknowledgement of the pain of the conflict and of the sacrifice entailed in giving up the potential to gain revenge. There was acceptance of different points of view and recognition of the need to work hard and respect the other, especially if that other had lost something which was irrecoverable. The act was also one of reassurance, of putting out of play that which could be used to cause further harm and lead to mutual destruction.

This, therefore, was an act of reconciliation and hope. In Scotland and in the rest of the UK, from Friday morning, that will need to be our guiding light. Acceptance, acknowledgment, recognition, reassurance. A rediscovery of all that binds us together and is common, rather than that which separates or has separated us. Getting into each other's shoes, we can walk together in one

direction, with a common destination, arm in arm, whatever the constitutional position. Some will say this is naïve. Well, what is the alternative? It is good to consider where we would go if we don't agree on what needs to happen next. That gives us a measure, a benchmark, against which to judge whether taking responsibility, showing courage, acting humbly and being disciplined about ourselves and with others is the proper course of action. Look over the precipice if you will, but don't push. We might all go down together.

There are golden bridges to be built to reach out to others who think and feel differently, leaps of faith to be made and trust to be regained. There are victory speeches to be written, not for ourselves but for others, so that, when they go back to their various constituencies, their words are words which work for us as well as for them. There will be concessions to be made, faces to be saved, hard positions to be softened. We'll need to be prepared to improvise and be flexible. And we'll need to assume that each is trying his or her best in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. There will again be no "us" and "them", only "us".

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The graphic features a black background with white text and a circular icon. The icon depicts a group of stylized human figures, with one figure in the center being magnified by a magnifying glass. The background is accented with horizontal lines in blue and green.

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