



Practical Steps: In training with Lisa Waas

2nd and 3rd of February 2023

About the CMA

The goal of the CMA is to help make mediation efforts throughout Africa more effective. We do so by offering academic and practical courses in mediation, researching new and current best practices, and offering support to organisations and governments involved in mediation processes.

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Summary

The Centre for Mediation in Africa (CMA) in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria was privileged to host and learn from Lisa Waas, an experienced mediator from the Mediation Institute in Munich. The CMA's Director, Professor Cori Wielenga invited Waas, who is based in Germany to share her expert knowledge and practical experience with the CMA team members.

The training sessions were held in the Department of Political Sciences seminar room at the University of Pretoria's Hatfield campus and Future Africa campus. All CMA members participated in the day-long workshop on Friday the 3rd of February, whilst Programme Directors engaged with Waas in one-on one sessions during the week. These sessions then culminated in a morning training session on Active Research and Mediative Team Building on Thursday the 2nd of February.

In the mediative team building session, programme directors were made aware of the need for communication with different team members especially when there is some tension or conflict in the team. The team process is where different persons are contained in a particular team, with different roles and the leader should have a mediative quality to bring diverse people together. In a mediative team building process team members recognise the danger of the "I" - I am not the expert - and there is an effort to engage in iterative dialogue in order to build trust. Part of the discussions included shifting from Eurocentric models, which do not reflect the African approach. Waas highlighted the need for pre-mediation to counter these biases and shortcomings and to recognise that part of holding the space as the mediator is the ability to be cognisant of the nuances and social justice issues. To avoid being naïve, mediators must do a significant amount of field research before going into a mediation team and process. This includes being alert and learning to read body language.

A prominent aspect of mediation training involves becoming conversant with and skilled in non-violent communication. Aspects of non-violent communication were included in both training days. Non-violent communication is a dynamic tool of mediation as it contains in it a conscious recognition of the humanity of all of us. When we situate ourselves in this mind-frame, we are able to recognise commonalities and differences and find a way to reach solutions. It is a process of communication developed by Marshall Rosenberg and functions

as a tool for positive social change by empowering us to understand what triggers us and to take responsibility for our reactions.

The team workshop day on Friday included a very 'special' session for the CMA participants, as it concluded with a practical scenario based on the Bohm Dialogue. It is named after physicist David Bohm, who originally proposed this form of dialogue. In this session, participants sat in a circle and participated in a free-flowing Bohm Dialogue (also known as Bohemian Dialogue or "Dialogue in the Spirit of David Bohm") in an attempt to reach a common understanding and appreciation of the team member's views and experiences, without being judgemental. This technique allows for a new and deeper understanding of another person's perspectives and experiences.

The Way Forward

During the participation and sharing session, the CMA's team members reiterated their gratitude in being in the CMA space. All members felt safe, acknowledged and comfortable enough to share their thoughts. A common theme that emerged was the uniqueness of the organisational structure and decision-making processes in the CMA which allowed everyone to give input. The shift from authoritarian, hierarchical decision-making processes gave members the confidence to contribute towards the building of the CMA knowing full well that their thoughts and input were valued. The sessions were productive and resource rich, fulfilling the CMA mandate that training of team members is part of the vision of the CMA to build a centre of excellence.