

## Report on Team Building Workshop for Mamas Alliance: South Africa



## 1. Introduction

In October 2021 Phaphama Initiatives responded to a brief requesting a team-building workshop for the personnel of Mamas Alliance based in South Africa. After due diligence, Mamas Alliance formally appointed Phaphama in November 2021 as a preferred service provider to deliver on this important work.

Phaphama and Mamas Alliance engaged in numerous discussions that resulted in the scheduling of this work for the beginning of 2022. Ultimately as is detailed in the following sections of this report, Phaphama implemented this work in two parts between January and February 2022. The first part was the one-on-one interviews with the participants, which were conducted on 19 January 2022. The second part was a two-day team-building workshop held on 21 - 22 February 2022.

This report provides the participants of the team-building workshop with an overview of the process, some facilitator observations and the way-forward to which the participants agreed at the end of the workshop. After a lengthy discussion during the last session of the workshop in which the participants grappled with the purpose of a report and the focus of their actions going forward, Phaphama was grateful to hear the team fully owning and honouring the work they had done together. We had a sense that the Mamas staff had felt the 'sacredness' of the honest and kind space they had begun to build in the two days, and that they wanted to build on this in the weeks and months ahead.

---

## 2. One-on-One Interviews

One-on-one interviews were done as part of the important prerequisite for the actual team-building intervention. Phaphama needed to establish if there were issues that could have in any way thwarted efforts to build a cohesive team. This information was key in determining the exact nature of the workshop.

As stated above, the one-on-one interviews took place on 19 January 2022. Seven participants were interviewed on the day. Five of them were interviewed in person, whilst two were interviewed telephonically. All interviews were conducted by the designated facilitators Judy Connors and Thamsanqa Mzaku. Those who were interviewed are:

- Kabelo Mosate
- German More
- Calisto Kondowe
- Gladys Mutemeri
- Rethabile Mphutlane
- Jane Masamba
- Siyethemba Dlamini

The participants approached the interviews with high levels of honesty and professionalism — something which made the planning process seamless, and for which we are grateful. One of the participants, Sylvia Mwila Luneta, was not interviewed on this day as she had already provided sufficient information for this purpose in preparing for the team-building intervention.

For the benefit of planning the intervention, the facilitators used a thematic approach, whereby the data gathered during the interviews was analysed and interpreted in the expression of the following five themes:

- 
- Affirmation
  - Community Building
  - Using communication to work constructively with conflict
  - Self-Growth
  - Power

The agenda of the two-day workshop was informed by these themes.

---

### 3. Team-Building Sessions

For the purposes of this report we discuss the observations and recommendations made by the facilitators in relation to the themes that were explored:

#### **Observations and Recommendations:**

Theme: Affirmation

The activities in this theme gave rise to some serious thought and discussion about how much of ourselves we bring into the workplace, and to what extent we are accepted for who we are. We also looked at what the implications are on our work of the traditionally-held argument that all we need to do in the workplace is to 'be professional'.

We are hoping that this theme challenged the notion, to some extent, that we do not need to be friends with our work colleagues because they are just our colleagues. As facilitators, we are aware that Mamas colleagues do spend social time together, which is valuable in itself. We would, however, also invite them to continue building a space between them where they can, as a team, have courageous conversations with one another when the need arises. This means, if I would like to speak with you about an issue that is worrying me, we agree to hold this conversation in the presence of all our colleagues. Our colleagues are then witnesses to the process and hold what they are hearing in a spirit of support and solidarity.

We offer this suggestion because there is a tendency with human dynamic issues that teams will speak honestly with one another if the process is facilitated by outsiders, or have the more difficult conversations one-on-one or one-on-two with each other. Rarely do they address challenging issues in the whole team, on their own. With the issue of gossip still being a reality in this team, meeting as a whole team to discuss even issues that affect only two or three people, would go a long way in creating transparency and intimacy (we use this word advisedly as we believe it is possible to be intimate in the workplace).

---

### Community-Building:

In this theme, Lands Work surfaced the commitment and passion of all team members to the mission of Mamas – everyone loved the work in communities and the transformative power of the programmes in people’s lives. Lands Work also revealed the fault lines and fractures. A number of departments felt like ‘islands’ and the sense of having to deal alone with the demands of work, and not being understood, was palpable and stressful. The ‘Management’ land also expressed its lack of role clarity and its purpose in the team.

An interesting dynamic arose with the appearance of the ‘ghost’ land i.e. the Netherlands. Some empathy for this land was introduced, but it was difficult for most to truly inhabit this land. Devoting more time to how this land fits in with the other lands would be very valuable.

The power of this activity became clear in the ten questions (listed below) that the team themselves generated. As one member said, “If we could find answers to all these questions, we will be a winning team!”

### Using communication to work constructively with conflict:

It was interesting for us, as facilitators, to note that the participants were usually able to formulate an I-message for someone in their personal life, only perhaps having to work on the need a little more. No one, however, attempted an I-message with a colleague. This will be the next step for the team i.e. to do this with one another.

There was also some questioning or disbelief that I-messages could always work, particularly if the person being addressed would be defensive or untruthful. As facilitators, we wish we had had more time to work on this, and we would urge team members to journal their ongoing daily use of I-messages (keeping record of the message, and of what worked and didn’t work) so that we could explore this together more in the future.





*Practicing I-messages*

#### Self-Growth:

This theme was our attempt to continue humanising the workplace, in the belief that we give of our best when we are fully integrated. Of course, becoming an integral human being requires a lifetime of work, and Lifelines was just a small taste of how we can bring the forgotten, neglected, hidden, 'shadow' parts of ourselves into the light. This was an intensely personal activity, so we did not debrief it to any great extent, trusting that each person will have been conscious of how it impacted him or her.

We also hope that each one will continue working on their lifeline in their own time. We also reiterate our suggestion that meetings begin with a personal check-in to encourage self-growth and a deepening level of trust in the team. Many check-in topics (some fun and some deeper) are given in the site <https://tscheck.in/>

Power:

The activities of Coloured Dots and Masks brought to light how we are still, to a large extent, deferential to the rules that have been put in place by someone else. When under pressure, we find it very difficult to remain constructively engaged in a process and we also default to our 'worst' behaviour of either dominating or withdrawing. In the debrief, however, it was gratifying to hear the level of self-reflection of each participant, and the willingness to make amends with those whom we had unintentionally hurt.

From the evaluations, it is clear that the relevance of the topic on power is not fully appreciated yet, and one of the reasons for this is possibly that we did not have time to delve fully into this. It is our sense that the team may be seeing power as deriving only from positional rank i.e. the position one holds in the workplace. There are, however, many different forms of rank at play when people are together i.e. social rank, local rank, psychological rank, spiritual rank and others. It would be good to work more on the subtleties of rank and power, because when these dynamics surface, people can begin to be intentional about how they use their power.

Apart from the specific themes we suggest could be further worked on (above), our overall encouragement to the team is to follow through on their proposed actions:

1. Define values for the team and find ways of making them living values.
2. Work on the questions that arose from Lands Work (listed below).
3. Consider a team-building workshop with the Netherlands.

---

#### 4. Participant evaluations

**What was your most valuable learning in this workshop? Please be specific, and explain why?**

- Lands work because it made me realise that people have challenges.
- Pencil game - that we need to focus on working together to keep the ball in the game.
- Lands games: Knowing more about other departments.
- That I must be more accommodating to those unlike myself.
- The most valuable learning was being in touch with my feelings and allowing myself to be vulnerable and open to my colleagues. I also learned more about myself and how to relate to people and leadership, and that I like open communication.
- Different approaches to conflict resolution.
- Understanding different personalities of people.
- To speak up even when the rules that are in place do not state so.
- To do away with internal oppression.
- Valuable learning – always speaks with kindness.
- Pressure or not, you always need to extend kindness.
- Include everyone. They may not ask but they may need it.
- The responsibility of those in power to give space to the powerless.
- Every department has pressures and same as individuals so do not judge.

---

### **What did you enjoy about this training?**

- That people were very open.
- The diversity of people's thoughts processes.
- Honesty and vulnerability of the team.
- The games.
- The practical exercises and games.
- The dialogue discussions. It was fun and educational.
- All the activities were amazing and there were parts that were emotional, because I had to dig deep and think about my past and life.
- The training was very enlightening and the facilitators were open and listened attentively. They created an amazing environment.
- Hearing different views from different people.
- Seeing things from a different perspective.
- The games (ball game), pencil game and elephant and palm tree. They enabled me to be a team player and to see the need to quickly adapt to change.
- I got to know my colleagues beyond work, backgrounds, family and values.
- You created space to speak.
- Activities had bigger lessons.

### **What did you not enjoy or not find valuable? Please be specific, and explain why?**

- The power theme because it is not so relevant in our team.
- Masks, I think it was not relevant and powerful to connect to day to day operations.
- I enjoyed all activities but felt like others were not direct representation of what would happen in real life e.g. the acting scenarios have too many different outcomes but we only did two stereotypical ones.
- Nothing.
- Everything was valuable to me.

### **What feedback would you like to give your facilitators?**

- Keep up the good work.
- Keep up the good work and being human during the session.
- Great job.
- I was enlightened on many things.
- The team building was great. It will help me not only in the work setting but also in my home setting to be a better leader.
- Thank you for your openness and nonjudgmental attitude. Your patience with the team and your ability to distance yourself from issues expressed.
- This was exciting and well thought.
- Keep up the good work.
- The games were diverse and very good.
- The icebreakers were great.
- Keeping cool and acknowledging everyone.

### **What suggestions do you have for the next steps that might be needed in Mamas now to sustain the momentum of this workshop?**

- Implement the steps we have agreed on.
- Meeting for a strategic plan to fix issues/challenges mentioned.
- Work on the plan of action and implement the agreement.
- Constant revisit on the recommendations we have given ourselves to implement them and execute them.

- 
- Another follow up team building to renew the steps taken after this initial team building session. Maybe in 6 months.
  - Introspection as individuals and realize that everyone has played some parts one way or another.
  - Accessibility.
  - Follow up from Phaphama.
  - Strategy from the team on resolving challenges.
  - Action steps.
  - Tackling the learnings.
  - Have a strategic plan with the whole team.
  - Have a fun team building.

---

## 5. Way Forward

From the activities of the two-day workshop, the participants committed to work on the following questions as the way-forward (we have clustered them in a way that makes sense to us – please feel free to suggest different headings):

### *Effective communication*

1. How do we improve internal communication?
2. How do we create a safe space for open communication?
3. How do I authentically speak my truth?
4. What is the line of communication?
  - A Grievance Procedure and
  - Standard Operating Procedures are a great need.
5. How do we stop office gossip?

### *Management*

6. How do we get to define the management role more clearly?
7. How do we support management to facilitate the relationship between Netherlands and South Africa?

### *Collaboration*

8. How do we foster cross-learning?

### *Deep Democracy (hearing and honouring all the voices)*

9. How are we included in decision-making?

### *Diversity*

10. How do we embrace diversity?

Judging by the comments in the evaluation section above, it is clear that the Mamas Alliance team acknowledge the amount of commitment required in building a winning team, and that this workshop was just the first step towards that goal.



## 6. Conclusion

It was a privilege to work with the Mamas team and we were humbled by the level of trust given to us. We would be willing to support you in whatever way feels appropriate in the months to come, and we know you have the commitment and skill to continue working with the issues that arose, as you take the next steps in your quest to build a more nurturing, happy and creative workplace. We leave the word 'productive' out because that we know you already are!!

Thamsanqa Mzaku and Judy Connors  
Phaphama Initiatives Facilitation Team  
2 March 2022