



From UN to Iraq, Zachary Metz finds PCP practices invaluable



Zachary Metz has taught student peacemakers in Lebanon. He has worked with Iraqi lawyers trying to create a process to handle property disputes. He has trained law enforcement, government, and NGO leaders from Northern Ireland to help build relationships. In all of these cases, he has brought PCP with him. "PCP's dialogic model is the best I've seen, ever," he says.

Metz is the Director of the Peace Building practice at Consensus, an innovative negotiation, conflict resolution, and peace-building consulting firm (www.consensusgroup.com), and was formerly the Director of Education & Training for Columbia University's Center for International Conflict Resolution (CICR). He teaches The Applied Workshop in International Conflict Resolution at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). He also has consulted to United Nations agencies and political and civil society leaders in more than a dozen countries.

Metz encountered PCP at the 2001 conference "Best Practices in Dialogue," where PCP Vice President Bob Stains was a panelist. He then used PCP's approach to facilitate a dialogue about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the campus of Columbia University. That experience was challenging, so in 2003 he took PCP's Power of Dialogue workshop.

Since then, he's used dialogue to help people communicate and "say what's real," even in areas experiencing deep, violent conflict. Dialogue, he says, "moves people forward, gets their needs met, and gets them through the deep stuff that otherwise gets in the way of collaboration or that could enrich collaboration if it were brought forward."

People may not necessarily be on "side A" or "side B," he says, but the context in which they live and work is polarizing. He cites a training he did for police officers, governmental officials, and NGO leaders from

Northern Ireland, to try to build relationships between law enforcement and civil society. Dialogue was a key part of that training: "Having the safety of a dialogic structure—for example, the communication agreements—means they can have conversations they cannot normally have . . . And civility, especially in a violent context, can be very meaningful."

Metz often offers people the opportunity to experience dialogue within more general trainings on communication, cooperation, or conflict transformation, such as at a week-long peace-building institute for college-age youth in the Middle East. He introduces the communication skills and interactive exercises as a way to prepare participants for dialogue. The skills are useful, he says, but it's the dialogue that "really stays with people."

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Does he see the effects of dialogue in the various areas of the world where he's worked? Yes and no.

"Dialogue in and of itself doesn't create results," he says. "It's not the destination, it's the path." He sees dialogue as less of a methodology than a phenomenon. Citing sociologist Émile Durkheim's notion of "collective effervescence," Metz notes that "people come together and something happens that is greater than the sum of its parts." ■

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IBM REPORT: PCP A "MODEL FOR FACILITATING DIALOGUE"

The Public Conversations Project was recently cited as a "model for facilitating dialogue about policy issues" by the IBM Center for the Business of Government. In the Center's recently released report "A Manager's Guide to Resolving Conflict in Collaborative Networks," the Public Conversations Project is one of three organizations highlighted for successfully engaging citizens in public policy decisions.

The report makes many recommendations in line with PCP's practices, such as, "To become an effective group problem solver... members should invest in preparation, bring an open mind to network meetings, and brainstorm options collaboratively with other network members."

Also in the report, authors Rosemary O'Leary and Lisa Blomgren Bingham share hopes that their public policy research "will serve to spark new and creative ways to solve collaboratively our most pressing public policy problems." O'Leary is Distinguished Professor of Public Administration at Syracuse University and Bingham is Keller-Runden Professor of Public Service at Indiana University—Bloomington. ■