

Sample Learning Event 2: Acting on power: strategies for analysis and change

Box 14 Sample Workshop

Part 2 – Acting on power: strategies for analysis and change

(recommended time: one day)

Key Questions: *What are the implications of these concepts and meanings of power for analysis and action? What tools and methods can be used to analyse power in context and develop strategies to shift or use power for positive social change?*

1. Introduction
2. Introducing the Power Cube
3. Complementary tools for analysis and action on power

Resources

Handout 3: Power and Empowerment (includes a diagram of the Power Cube)
Powerpoint

1. Introduction

Objective: The purpose of this learning event is to begin to apply a “power lens” or perspective to practice and real-life situations, with a focus on the issues and challenges that were identified in Part 1. In this event the Power Cube is introduced as a framework for analysis and strategising, in addition to other tools and methods that can be used to apply the various concepts of power.

Note that the Power Cube can also be introduced much earlier in a learning event, particularly if it's a shorter presentation of the concepts. In this sample workshop, it is presented simultaneously as a method of analysis and a tool for strategising.

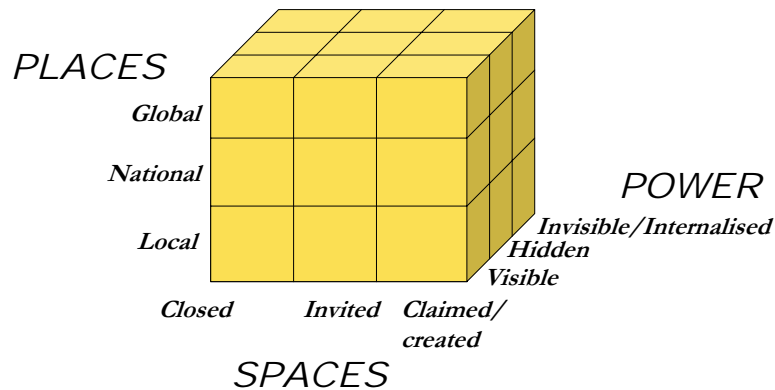
2. Introducing the Power Cube

In this Sample Workshop, having explored the various meanings of power in some depth – and in particular the three faces of power – the Power Cube is introduced as a framework for exploring the way power (in particular the three faces) operates in different kinds of spaces and at different levels. It is also possible, as noted in the *Understanding* section of this pack, to begin with any of the three dimensions, depending on the purpose of the learning event. For example, if the aim of the event is to identify arenas or spaces for action, one can begin there; if concerned about building links across different levels of power, one can start with the levels, etc.¹

A diagram is provided in **Handout 3: Power and Empowerment**

¹ Thanks to John Gaventa for this advice

The “Power Cube” framework



Spaces

Introduce the idea of “spaces” as used in social and political analysis (see Gaventa 2006, p. 25). There are many meanings, some more limited to formal institutional mechanisms of decision-making, others more openly defined as channels or opportunities for people to engage in shaping meanings, decisions or policies.

“...In this analysis, ‘spaces’ are seen as opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships that affect their lives and interests.” (Gaventa 2006, p25)

Ask learners to name different kinds of spaces they have experienced, and to think about what categories they might use to name these spaces. Raise questions about who created or controls the spaces, whose rules operate, who has access and who doesn't. Then present the idea of “**closed**”, “**invited**”, and “**claimed/created**” spaces. Allow sufficient time to really explore the meanings of these different kinds of “spaces” and to identify examples of them from participants’ stories and experiences and case studies.

Option for extended exploration of spaces: Once there is some clarity about the meaning of closed, invited and claimed/created spaces, one can ask what other kinds of spaces there might be (if examples have not already been identified). For example, in a study of civil society participation in Colombia, five types of “spaces for engagement” were identified:

- Formal by invitation
- Formal by right
- Created by institutions

- Created by organisations
- Transient collective action

Levels or Places

Drawing from Gaventa (2006, p 27-28) discuss the different “levels” or “places” in which people engage in seeking to effect change, from the intimate, personal and private levels, to public places at the local, regional, national or global levels.

Box 14 Places or levels of participation

Some would argue that participatory practice must begin locally, as it is in the arenas of everyday life in which people are able to resist power and to construct their own voice. Others argue that power is shifting to more globalised actors, and struggles for participation must engage at that level. In between, there are debates on the role of the nation state, and how it mediates power; on how the possibilities of local spaces often depend on the extent to which power is legitimated nationally, but shared with the locality. Those concerned with decentralisation, for instance, focus on the dynamics of power between the locality and the nation state, while others argue for the importance of community associations as key locations for building power ‘from below’.

There is also a risk of focusing only on the ‘local’, or the ‘national’ in a globalising world. Globalisation is shifting traditional understandings of where power resides and how it is exercised, transforming traditional assumptions of how and where citizens mobilise to hold states and non-state actors to account... New extra-national fora are emerging in which citizens try to engage. Rather than being separate spheres, the local, national and global are increasingly interrelated. Local forms and manifestations of power are constantly being shaped in relationship to global actors and forces, and in turn, local action affects and shapes global power. [adapted from Gaventa 2006, p. 27-28]

The interrelationships of places, spaces and forms of power

Putting the dimension of “**spaces**” together with that of “**levels and places**”, one can begin to see the multiple and interconnected moments, formal and informal, in which different actors engage in shaping meanings, decisions and policies. Each of these moments is also likely to be influenced by one or more of the “**three faces of power**”.

“...the dynamics of power depend very much on the type of space in which it is found, the level at which it operates and the form it takes. ...Along each dimension, any sustained and effective change strategy must concern itself with how to build and sustain effective change across the full continuum. Transformative, fundamental change happens, I suggest, in those rare moments when social movements or social actors are able to work effectively across each of the dimensions simultaneously, i.e. when they are able to link the demands for opening

previously closed spaces with people's action in their own spaces; to span across local and global action, and to challenge visible, hidden and invisible power simultaneously. ...Successful change is about getting each of the pieces on each dimension of the cube to align with each other, simultaneously." (Gaventa 2006, p.30)

Drawing on Gaventa (pp 30-32) and using examples from participants' experiences, facilitate a discussion of how these dimensions are interrelated in practice.

It is helpful to point out that the spaces and levels dimensions of the Power Cube are not fixed: they are more like a continuum, and there are likely to be multiple forms (e.g. from closed to claimed spaces, or from the local to the global). Similarly, with power, what is hidden or invisible can be made visible (through empowerment processes), and that the basis for visible power may be forms of hidden or invisible power. Each context requires its own analysis.

There is sometimes a temptation at this point to try putting experiences or examples *into* the boxes, as in completing a matrix. This has been found to confuse rather than help. It is more useful to think of the Power Cube, and its dimensions, as a set of *lenses* for making sense of particular contexts, moments and strategies of engagement. It is useful for seeing how these moments may be related to one another, and how multiple strategies may be needed to address different forms of power arising in different spaces and levels.

The advantage of this approach is that it can point to openings or possibilities for action that have not been considered before, which may enable civil society groups or other actors to "shift power" in strategic ways that can make a difference. It can be used to identify new entry points, or ways in which complementary strategies may be effective.

Further Resources for Introducing the Power Cube

Power Twister Game (see also Handout 7)

This is a fun exercise that can be used to explore the dimensions of the Power Cube, adapted from the party game "Twister" in which players stand in or stretch across different squares on the floor.

A 3 x 3 grid of nine squares is laid out on the floor with tape or string, about 5m across. "Rows" can be labelled with pieces of paper as representing *Global*, *National* and *Local* levels, and the "Columns" can be labelled with the three kinds of spaces, *Closed*, *Invited* and *Claimed*.

Participants are asked to think about how and where they engage in their own work, and which spaces and levels they would stand in. They are also asked to reflect on what kind of power they are working with or

are up against in this work, and to write it on a piece of paper: *Visible*, *Hidden* or *Invisible* (or they may also choose *Power to*, *Power with* etc)

Participants hold the pieces of paper with the forms of power written on them (or tape or pin them to their clothing) and then stand in the appropriate square or across two squares.

Discussion can then be facilitated, from where people are standing, about why they chose to represent their work as engaging in these spaces and levels, with whom, and dealing with which forms of power.

More detailed instructions and examples are provided in the ***Power Twister Game* handout 7**.