

Sample Workshop 1 by Jethro Pettit

This section outlines a sample learning event, using a sequence of exercises to help learners to connect their personal experience and case studies with concepts and theories of power. The process combines creative and analytical methods of learning, as well as individual and collective sense-making. The process flows from individual reflection, to creative writing, to storytelling, to enactment, to group reflection and processing of what has been shared, to integrating experience with concepts and theories.

This particular sequence has worked well in practice. However, the various exercises can also be used selectively, e.g. if time is limited, or if holding a series of shorter meetings, or the facilitator is comfortable with some methods more than others. The order can also be changed. For example, sharing of experience using creative and reflective methods may instead be done *after* introducing and discussing concepts of power. Learners can also be asked to make their own presentations of concepts and to integrate theory with their stories and cases.

The key principle behind the design of your learning event is to iterate between experience and concepts, so even in a shorter event it is possible to ask learners to briefly reflect on their own experiences of feeling powerful or powerless, then introduce some concepts, and then go back to deepen reflection and analysis using these concepts.

The Sample Learning Event has two main parts:

Part 1 - Exploring power: experiences and concepts

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

Sample Workshop

Part 1 - Exploring power: experiences and concepts

(recommended time: one day)

Key Questions: *What is power, and how do we experience it in our own lives? What sense can we make of these experiences? How does power arise and operate within our work, our working relationships, and strategies? What concepts and frameworks are useful for understanding power?*

1. Introduction
2. Feeling Power (reflection, creative writing or drawing)
3. Telling Power (storytelling)
4. Enacting Power (drama and body sculpting)
5. Understanding Power (concepts and meanings)

Resources to accompany the Learning Event - Part 1:

LearningEventPart1 (powerpoint presentation)

Handout 3: Power and Empowerment (summary of concepts of power)

Handout 4: Power Cartoons (cartoons representing different forms of power)

Handout 5: ChickenRun (instructions and timing of scenes for animated film)

Handout 6: Visible, Hidden and Invisible Power: three scenarios
(scenario exercise on three faces of power)

For more details on these resources go to **section 6.1 on Handouts and Exercises**

Part 1 - Exploring power: meanings and experiences

Key Questions: *What is power, and how do we experience it in our own lives? What sense can we make of these experiences? How does power arise and operate within our work, our working relationships and strategies? What concepts and frameworks are useful for understanding power?*

1. Introduction *(Time: 60 minutes to a half day, depending on objectives)*

Objectives: The purpose of this introduction is to frame the event by helping participants identify the challenges they face in their activities or work, and the reasons they may want to deepen their understanding of power.

Opening activities: Although not elaborated here, this session should include personal introductions (if learners / facilitators don't know one another), a review of the purpose and learning outcomes, overview of the agenda and process, any other logistical matters, and some kind of warm-up exercise.

Context and challenges: Identifying the contexts, issues and challenges in which learners want to explore power may be a very brief exercise, or it may be a discrete learning event lasting half a day or more (e.g. as part of a course, longer workshop or action learning process). This is an important step, and may require some advance preparation by participants and a half or full day session. *The main point is to identify where it is that power needs to be explored.*

Examples of challenges *(context and actors can be added to each):*

- **achieving meaningful participation:** what is participation and what are the challenges of making it real?
- **applying a rights-based approach:** what are rights-based approaches, and what are the challenges of achieving rights?
- **strengthening citizenship or democracy** – what is citizenship (or what is democracy) and what are the challenges of strengthening it?
- **strengthening civil society** – what is civil society, why strengthen it, and what are the challenges of doing this?
- **empowerment of a marginalised group** – what are the specific challenges facing a particular group, or efforts to mobilise, gain power or equality?
- **facilitating organisational change** – what needs to change in your workplace or organisation, and what are the challenges faced?

- ***addressing corporate power*** – what challenges arise in efforts to create change in the private sector, from within or from without?

This session may be focused on the issues facing a particular community, a sector or service provider, an organisation, a strategic aim, policy or issue. Note that the focus here is on the naming the context, issues and challenges, and is not yet an exploration of the forms that power may take (which follows in the next section).

Ways of exploring these issues and challenges might include posing some questions, such as the examples given above and below.

Examples of questions:

- what are the goals of your work / programme / initiative?
- what is the context? who are you working with? what issues?
- what kind of change you would like to see happen?
- what enables or prevents change from happening?

The learners can then be asked to share their own experiences and case studies, which you may have asked them to prepare in advance. These can be shared in small groups, keeping a time limit to each, and asking groups for quick report-backs or asking groups to share one particularly engaging case study or example, with a focus on the challenges faced.

More visual methods can also be used like drawing, mapping diagrams, or “rich pictures” (where a small group of people represent the challenge or case study in flip chart paper with symbols, drawings and arrows using coloured pens).

Noticing issues of power

It can be very effective to encourage people to share experiences and identify power issues without initially using the word ‘power’. As a facilitator you can let the discussion develop and then drop power into the conversation: ‘you realise we’re talking about power here...’ or posing questions like ‘what’s going on here?’, ‘why do you think this is happening?’, ‘who is this serving, and who is it harming?’ ‘what is standing in the way of change?’¹

As learners share their experiences, the facilitator can begin to inquire into the ways in which power plays a role in the challenges being faced. For example, the ways in which voice, participation or citizenship are limited by power; the ways that rights are ignored or violated as the result of power; the ways in which power arises in organisations, etc. Encourage learners to make these connections using their own ways of understanding power.

Examples of themes for discussion:

¹ Thanks to Kate Hamilton for the suggestions and guide questions in this paragraph.

Many organisations and governments promote participation and 'empowerment' and believe that people should have a stronger voice in decision-making. But putting these principles into practice is often disappointing for everyone. Underlying power dynamics and relations are often not addressed, and participation is seen as an instrumental way of delivering project outcomes or being 'democratic'. How is participation (or rights, citizenship, democracy, organisations, etc) affected by relations of power and powerlessness?

But what is power? And what is empowerment? What concepts and frameworks for understanding power are useful to those who want to empower themselves? For those trying to empower others? For those seeking to become more aware of their own power?

Option for focus or extension of the discussion

There is always a risk, in such discussions, that the topic can expand and the focus get lost. If desired, some of the introduction and framing of "what is power?" outlined in Section 5 on "Understanding Power" (below) can also be brought in at this stage to maintain the focus, or to extend the discussion. For example, raising questions and discussion about:

- whether we think of power as a negative or positive thing, and what are the positive forms that power can take
- whether power is something that can be held and used by actors (power as a form of domination, control or "power over")
- what other forms power can take, such as social norms and beliefs (power as discourse, knowledge, internalised thought and behaviour)
- whether power is "zero-sum" (winner and losers) or expandable

[For more information on the above go to **Section 2** of the Power Pack on Understanding the Power Cube and Related Concepts.]

The purpose of this more focused or extended discussion is not to introduce concepts and frameworks yet, but to draw out the different ways of understanding power and challenge any assumptions that power is defined in one particular way.

Transition to next exercise

Having established the challenges, issues and context in which power needs to be understood, explain that the group will now begin to explore power together - starting with personal reflection and creative writing, moving into storytelling, and then to drama (or the exercises you have selected to use).

If necessary, you may wish to explain the reasons for using creative methods like writing, storytelling and drama for exploring the meaning of power. Keep this

brief and be confident; in our experience people really enjoy these exercises and say they learn and remember a lot through them.

2. Feeling Power: reflection, creative writing or drawing (10-15 minutes)

Objectives: to use creative learning methods to explore personal experiences of power and powerlessness, as a basis for developing concepts and theories that help to explain power later in the exercise.

Ask participants to think about “a personal or professional experience in which you felt powerful, powerless or empowered”. Depending on the workshop theme, this can be substituted with other kinds of experiences, for example

“a moment of contradiction or discomfort in your work”

“an ethical dilemma you faced in your work”

“an experience of being a citizen (or part of a civil society organisation)”

“trying to make yourself heard in relation to power / authority / expertise”

“being in a position of power / authority / expertise”

“a moment you tried to get your rights recognised”

This exercise can be done as a moment of quiet recollection, without writing, or as a writing exercise. Drawing can also be used. Some guidelines to learners:

- Choose one particular incident or event, rather than a broad experience over time.
- Choose an experience that you feel comfortable sharing with other here; not something that will be traumatic to explore in this setting.
- Use a creative, rich narrative and imagery to bring the event to life. Think about the following aspects of the event:
 - what is the setting?
 - who are the characters?
 - what is happening with the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, etc)?
 - what is the action or dialogue?
 - what feelings and emotions did you or other characters experience (anger, confusion, sadness, elation)?

Ask learners to use “rich description” in their recollection, writing or drawing, and keep their focus on the above dimensions of the story, rather than creating a summary or analysis of what happened. Ask them to think about it like a scene in a movie or book, in a way that allows someone else to experience the moment.

If using writing... you can invite learners to use a “freefall” method... and offer these guidelines: [credit Barbara Turner here]

- Let the writing lead and see where it takes you

- Do not censor yourself or correct your language
- Go “fearwards” (to areas that may be sensitive)
- Bring the event to life: senses, feelings, actions, dialogue
- Avoid shifting into analysis, summary mode, or generalisations

Allow 6-10 minutes for writing. Encourage people to write in whatever language they are most comfortable writing in.

If using drawing... for those interested in visual images, and with learners who are less literate, drawing or painting is an option. Provide paper, coloured pens or pastels, or paints. Encourage people to be free with colours, shapes, symbols and stick figures, and reassure them that it doesn't have to be pretty or realistic.

If just reflecting... If time is short, and with less literate learners, as for a 4-5 minute period of silent reflection, during which participants can write or draw if they wish. Ask them to focus on evoking the image and feeling of the moment, as if they were there.

If preparing in advance... This can also be asked for as a writing, drawing or reflective assignment before the session, to save time, but its best to provide time and guidance for this in the workshop itself.

Other creative media... Those who would like to explore movement, poetry or song can also do so, but as with the writing and drawing, encourage them to do this in a spontaneous and improvised way, rather than creating a polished product.

3. Telling Power (storytelling) (15-20 minutes)

Objective: Whether building on the previous exercise, or used separately, storytelling is a powerful method of bringing personal experience and narrative into learning, and will enrich the exploration of concepts later on.

In small groups of 3 or 4 people, ask learners to take turns sharing their stories (reflection, writing, drawing, poems, pictures, songs, etc), allowing about 3-5 minutes per person. Ask each group to have a timekeeper, or use a bell or signal to indicate when to change. Invite learners to either read their writing or tell the story (show drawing, etc), or if it is too sensitive, to talk about what it was like to recollect the story. Pictures and narrative stories can work well together.

Suggest to the groups that after each story or sharing, the other two members should respond and acknowledge what they have heard very briefly, sharing one or two words about how they feel in response, but without getting into questions, discussion or analysis.

(Note: if using the following exercise it is important to ask participants to refrain from moving into interpretation or analysis of their stories. Keep it at the tacit and emotional level for now, in order to get the most out of these exercises.)

4. Enacting Power (drama and body sculpting) (30-60 minutes depending on group size)

Objective: This exercise allows learners to explore their experiences of power through body, theatre and movement, which are well-known as methods that deepen learning and reflection, and will enhance the analysis to follow.

Preparation

In the same groups of 3 or 4, choose one story that you will 'enact' with a brief body sculpture or acted scene (skit/sketch). A body sculpture means positioning group members in relation to each other in a symbolic, abstract configuration, or like a snapshot of one moment (or a couple of moments). This may be frozen and silent or could include a repetitive movement and sounds. A short sketch or skit acting out the scene is also OK, but should be kept to one or two key moments, not the whole story. The moment can also be transposed into a fantasy, myth, or fairy tale or use animals or fictional characters instead of the actual people.

Guidelines for groups

- a) Choose the story or scene you want to represent, or make a combination of more than one story if there is a common theme
- b) If a body sculpture or tableau, decide what image you want to make, how the group members will be positioned in relation to each other and if any/all are to make a movement and/or sound and how these movements and sounds will connect.
- c) If a skit/sketch, decide roles, dialogue and action; keep your scene to a brief and critically important moment, not the whole story.
- d) Practice briefly to ensure that it 'works' for you.

Important safety tips for facilitators

- Give permission for anyone not comfortable with acting or body work to observe rather than participate in the enactment
- Ask participants to be self-aware of their actions and movements and how others in their scene might experience them
- Suggest that any physical contact be imitated, leaving spaces between actors (unless learners are experienced with theatre and are confident and comfortable with each other)
- Be aware of any cultural and gender norms in what is acceptable for physical contact in a public setting.

Performances

Designate a stage on one side of the room. Ask the groups to present their scenes. Following each brief presentation, ask the audience (other participants) to share their initial reactions (one or two words) on how they feel after seeing the sculpture/tableau. Then the group who presented can briefly explain what the tableau/sculpture was about.

Discussion

After all the presentations are done, a discussion can be facilitated to draw out the different experiences of power, powerlessness, empowerment (or themes related to citizenship, moments of contradiction, ethical dilemmas, depending on the theme being explored) that were represented and begin to analyze their meaning. Participants should be encouraged to develop their own theories and explanations and to share any concepts they may already be familiar with from readings, prior experience, etc.

The further this discussion can go, the better, before moving to the more formal “inputs” introducing concepts, theories and frameworks related to the theme. The points from this discussion, and the scenes enacted, can also be referred to again as examples to illustrate the various frameworks introduced in the following session.

Note: it is quite possible that issues of power within the group or between group members may arise during these exercises and the ensuing discussion. The facilitator should be aware of these, and allow time to explore them if appropriate, build on them as part of the learning process if possible, or if not be prepared to gently contain them and address them outside of the event.

The above sequence of creative exercises can be done in a half-day workshop, or a 2-3 hr session if shortened. Be sure to allow time to discuss and process what comes out of the storytelling and performances. You may be surprised!

5. Understanding Power (concepts and meanings) (1.5 - 2 hours)

Objective: Exploring some of key concepts, theories and frameworks of power, and making connections to the experiences shared and explored in the previous exercises in order to deepen understanding.

Key questions: *What are some different ways of understanding power? What concepts, theories and frameworks are helpful? How do these concepts help to explain the experiences of power and powerlessness represented in our stories? How do these meanings of power differ from each other?*

There are many different ways that concepts and frameworks of power can be introduced, for example:

- as a short lecture or “input” on concepts followed by discussion
- presentations by learners based on their understandings, experiences or reading about power
- allowing concepts to emerge as “grounded theory” through the sharing of experience, linking basic concepts with illustrative examples
- linking to more theoretical sources and academic debates (see **handout 1**)– but it’s quite possible to share concepts without this dimension.²

Whichever methods are used, it can be helpful to present and contrast some key concepts and frameworks in one way or another. The following sequence, much of it inspired by **A New Weave of Power** by Lisa VeneKlasen with Valerie Miller, works quite well, but again, be flexible and adapt to your context and to what comes up in this session, including power dynamics arising within the group itself.

1. **Power as a contested concept - introduction**
2. **Alternative forms of power**
3. **Public, Private and Intimate power**
4. **Visible, Hidden and Invisible Power**
5. **Power as discourse, knowledge, social norms and beliefs**

Explanations of these concepts and frameworks and their sources are available in **section 2** of the Power Pack **Understanding the Power Cube and related concepts**. What follows is a brief outline that can be used by facilitators, including links to useful handouts and visual aids.

Before going into these frameworks, a brief introduction is suggested. (Note that some of this introduction can also be used either before the reflection and creative exercises for sharing experiences, or following the drama presentations as part of the transition to exploring concepts and meanings).

Power as a contested concept – introduction

Power is often considered to be an “essentially contested” concept. There is much debate and controversy and different ways of defining power, and they do not fit together around any one coherent concept or framework. So there is no agreed definition or theory of power. Rather, there are many different ways of seeing and explaining power, and processes of empowerment.

² Thanks to John Gaventa for this insight.

The same words are often used to describe fundamentally different things. Yet how we understand power has a direct bearing on the choices we make about “empowering” ourselves and others, individually and collectively, in processes of social and political change, decision-making, participation and governance.

Some questions to consider (can be discussed with reference to experiences shared in stories and drama)...

People or structures?

- Is power something that is possessed by some individuals or groups, and not possessed by others? At one extreme, power is seen as all about deliberate and wilful domination of some people by others.
- Power is often defined as the ability to make someone to what you want them to do, even if against their will. (“A’s ability to make B do something that B might not otherwise do”)
- At the other extreme, power is viewed as deeply (and unconsciously) embedded in social and cultural norms, behaviour, ideology, values – so deeply embedded that we usually can’t see it or change it.
- This reflects long-standing debates in social science about ‘agency’ (where power is held by people who choose their actions) v. ‘structure’ (where power and behaviour are embedded in social systems).

Power, legitimacy and authority

- Politics is often seen essentially as being about power held by people: who has it, and who doesn’t; and how these differences are worked out; also about how power can be held legitimately.
- This view of power is not always coercive: those in power have a ‘right’ to use it, which is often accepted by those without it (for example in democratic politics we deliberately and legitimately delegate power to others to rule on our behalf).
- This can raise questions of the differences between **power** and **authority**, which are often divided in social and political theory, notably in Max Weber’s work on bureaucracy.
- We don’t explore these theories here, but it can be with discussing when the use of power is legitimate or consented to, and when it is not.
Questions can also be asked about the meanings of ‘consent’, ‘legitimacy’ and ‘authority’, for example how were the rules made and how easily can they be challenged or changed?

Is power limited or expanding?

- Is power a finite resource, or an unlimited one? Is it a “Zero-Sum” resource? Does gaining power always mean that others lose it? Or can power be expansive and unlimited?

Is power positive or negative?

- This also raises the question of whether power is positive or negative. Often assumed to be negative – but is it? Can we do anything without power? What are some of the positive forms it can take?

Alternative forms of power

Source: VeneKlasen and Miller (2002, Chapter 3) and Rowlands (1995)

A dominant view of power is the notion of “**power over**”, where one person or group of people dominates or controls another. This is often viewed in negative terms, and with power as a limited resource. But there are other views that see power as a necessary force for change, as positive, and not necessarily limited to a “zero-sum” game.

- “**power to**” – individual ability to act, linked to idea of capability
- “**power with**” – collective action, the ability to act together
- “**power within**” – individual or collective self-worth and dignity

In exploring these concepts, draw out examples of these forms of power from the stories and dramas. How do these experience differ from “power over”? How do these forms of power respond to “power over”?

Notice that these are all views of power as a kind of “agency”, something that people hold and use in relation to each other. But how are these forms of power related to the view of power as embedded in social norms and values, or “structure”?

Further discussion can be led about whether power is a finite resource that must be struggled over (“zero-sum”) or infinite and expandable.

Public, private and intimate realms of power

Source: VeneKlasen and Miller (2002, Chapter 3)

Those taking a gender perspective have long recognised the different ways that women and men experience power in the public, private and intimate realms of their lives, linked to social and cultural constructions of gender:

- “**public**” realm of power (visible, employment, public life, relationships)
- “**private**” realm of power (family, relationships, friends, marriage)
- “**intimate**” realm of power (self-esteem, self-confidence, relationship to body, sense of physical or emotional autonomy in relation to others)

These can be presented visually or in a hand-out. In discussing these, draw out examples from the stories and dramas; what realms did these take place in, and how did they affect the experience of power or powerlessness? Did women and men experience power in these realms differently?

Discussion can be guided about how these forms of power and powerlessness arise in different cultures and situations, and how (for example) women and men may experience different limitations and possibilities depending on which realm they are in at a given time. Introduce the idea that our experience of power can be dynamic and related to moments and spaces.

Connections can be made between one's experience of power in the "intimate" realm and one's sense of "power within". See VeneKlasen and Miller (2002, 2007) and Just Associates (2006) for further resources.

Three faces of power

(Source: Lukes 1975/2005; Gaventa 198x; VeneKlasen & Miller 2002)

These three "faces" make up the power dimension of the Power Cube, and the background and concepts are elaborated in the Concepts section of this pack, as well as linked resources. In learning events, it can be helpful to give a bit of history of the context in which these ideas arose and were applied. The following brief summary may be useful to facilitators.

The idea of there being "three faces of power" came originally from debates about democratic politics, and disagreements about whether some groups use their power to dominate others. Is democratic decision-making a "pluralist" process where all groups have the same chance to express their interests and shape decisions, and the process can be clearly observed? Or are there other kinds of power at work that might prevent people from taking part, voicing their opinions, raising issues, observing the process, or engaging in any debate or conflict, leading to biased and undemocratic outcomes.

Such debates took place in the US in the 1950s and 1960s, between those who felt that American democracy was essentially open, fair and "pluralist" and those who were concerned that elites and powerful interest groups were dominating the process and in one way or another keeping people from participating, making sure that some issues were not even debated, and that conflicts did not even arise.

These debates were summarised and challenged in Steven Lukes' classic book *Power: A Radical View* (1974, 2005), in which he identifies three different dimensions or "faces" of power – the third dimension being his own contribution to the debate. John Gaventa's later study of the struggles of Appalachian mining communities (19xx) further explored the way these three faces of power combine to keep people silent. The three faces were also used in VeneKlasen and Miller's *A New Weave of Power* to explore the possibilities and limitations for citizen advocacy. They used the terms "visible", "hidden" and "invisible" power:

“visible power” – formal and observable decision-making, pluralist politics with visible “power over” and clear winners and losers

“hidden power” – setting the agenda behind the scenes, mobilising biases and interests, excluding people and issues from debates

“invisible power” – shaping public opinion and needs; social conditioning, ideology and values; may be “internalised”

It is worth taking time to discuss these concepts in some depth, and to apply them to examples and experiences such as those shared by learners.

Go to **Handout 3: Power and Empowerment** in **section 6 of the resources section of this Power Pack** . **Note:** This handout combines definitions of concepts with description of strategies in a way that helps clarify both. In facilitating, it can also be effective to use strategies as a way into thinking about power. Instead of starting with the power concepts or context analysis, start from what learners are doing or planning as organisations/change agents, and work backwards from that to unpack what assumptions we’re making about how things work, where power lies, where it’s not an issue and why...etc. This can be an effective way of building on experience and handling resistance to concepts.³

Power as socialized and internalized norms

This theme is intended to be used with support from the ideas and resources in the **section 3.1 other ways of understanding power**. These concepts can be used both to further explore the meaning of “invisible” power and as entirely different approach to explaining what power is.

“Invisible” power, in relation to “visible “ and “hidden” power, is partly understood as a form “agency”, in which some people or groups dominate others (for example by the deliberate use of ideology, the media, etc. to shape people’s preferences). It can be understood as a wilful attempt to influence the needs and thinking of others, shaping what they perceive to be possible in their lives, which then becomes internalized.

But there is also a strong element of “structure” and deeply socialized norms. Some argue that this is distinct from the concept of “invisible power” as used by Lukes (as a conscious form of domination or “power over”). In this more sociological understanding, power is something that is everywhere and affects everyone, in the form of social and cultural norms, ideology, discourse, values and behavior that become accepted subconsciously as “normal”.

Many influential social theorists have contributed to this more “structural” understanding of power, as a pervasive and often invisible phenomenon that gradually becomes “hegemonic” and internalized into consciousness. Here we

³ Thanks to Kate Hamilton for this suggestion

briefly highlight the thinking of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Clarissa Hayward. Other sources include Antonio Gramsci and James C Scott.

It may not be necessary to go into these theories in any depth, depending on the learning event, but it is worth discussing these concepts in some form. Again, the experiences and examples raised by participants may provide opportunities to explore these understandings of power.

Excerpt from *Handout 3 Power and Empowerment*

Socialised and internalised power (Foucault, Bourdieu, Hayward)

- (a) Foucault: Power as truth or knowledge . A "structural" view of power (v. seeing power as a question of "agency", or individual or group action). Foucault saw power as a "regime of truth" or "discourse" that can take a long time to change, involving basic changes in perception or thinking. He also saw power as embodied through socialised and embodied processes of discipline and control.
- (b) Bourdieu: Power as 'symbolic violence' which creates 'embodied dispositions', or *habitus* ...These dispositions give rise to 'fields' or 'socially stratified spaces', norms and conventions. We 'incorporate' or 'inscribe' these ways of behaving into our bodies and actions. Our dispositions or 'habitus' are 'spontaneously attuned' and perceived as part of the natural order of things
- (c) Hayward: 'Defacing power' (1998) Power as a network of social boundaries that enables or constrains the behaviour or freedom of all actors

