Power Dynamics Reflection Tool and Supporting Guidance

Power dynamics—real or perceived—often influence individual and team beliefs, perspectives and actions. Those with less power may not be comfortable sharing their perspective. Good leaders and teams become aware of those dynamics by listening closely, modeling vulnerability, and using their own influence to create space for those with less power to share their opinions.

The power dynamics tool is meant to help make power dynamics visible within teams and organizations and enable teams to explore how identities influence power dynamics. It is a part of the **cultivating trusting relationships** element.

The 6 bases of power article and tool are created by Bertram H. Raven.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

This tool provides the skeleton materials necessary to walk a team through the power dynamics tool. **Feel free to tailor these materials to meet your specific needs and context and leverage existing opportunities within your team to engage in this work (e.g., divide between multiple existing meetings, use existing meeting structures to work through the tool, iterate on the process over months as work allows). *Please make electronic copies of the materials for team use.***[1] The sections of this tool include:

- Objectives
- 2-part facilitation Plan including the power dynamics tool, based off the 6 bases of power article and the 10+1 ideas that fuel oppression article
- Additional resources

There are many ways this tool can be used. One example is as follows:

> *For one state in the Coherence Lab Fellowship[1], the power dynamics tool made space for the team to candidly discuss power dynamics. This involved convening members of the agency's senior leadership team or cabinet, including the chief state school officer and assistant superintendents as well as other agency*

[1] Context about the Coherence Lab Fellowship and instructions for how to make electronic copies can be found in the Coherence Toolkit Overview.

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leaders, such as directors and assistant directors responsible for leading specific agency programs and initiatives. This process led to someone with less positional power feeling increasingly confident sharing their opinion in various spaces.

OBJECTIVES

By using this tool, you will be able to:

- Begin to examine issues of identity–make connections between identity and how it shapes mindsets and behaviors
- Explore how identities emerge in the structures, relationships and decisions related to a team's focus or problem

PART 1: FACILITATION PLAN (45 minutes+Prework)

Time	Title	Description	Person(s) Responsible
20 min	Prework	Ask each team member to read the 10+1 ideas that fuel oppression article*	Facilitator
5 min	Welcome and introduction	Welcome the team. Provide time for team members to read the prework article, if they have not already done so. • Review objectives for our time together	Facilitator
10 min	Individual written reflection	Prompt team members to use journals or a piece of paper to reflect on the following questions: • *How do my identities show up in the article, 10+1 ideas that fuel oppression?* • *How have I experienced other people's identity based power?* • *Reflect on a recent situation at your org where power dynamics were at play.* • *What aspects of identity might have been at play?* • *How might the bases of power and identity have intersected?*	Facilitator Journals/ notebooks
30 min	Small group discussion	(25 min) Pair/small group discussion of individual reflection on each question (4 min per person to share)	Facilitator

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		***Facilitator note**: The objective of this discussion is to make power dynamics visible. You want to be sensitive to framing and acknowledging power dynamics within the team. It can be helpful for team members with positional power to acknowledge its presence and express that they do not hold different power than other team members within the context of this discussion.* • *It can be a good time to revisit any group norms that exist.* • *Might be helpful to consider the perspective of other roles/ stakeholders who are closer to experiencing power differentials. Be cognizant of the voices that might not be in the room and how you can meaningfully engage them to share their own experiences.* • *Note may be useful to refer back to group norms and underscore creating the conditions and space to share and push.* (5 min) Conversation wrap-up and preview of part 2. In part 2 you'll complete a similar thought exercise and small group discussions, and then discuss as a full group.	

Alternatively, use the circles of identity tool

PART 2: FACILITATION PLAN (1.25 hours+Prework)

Time	Title	Description	Person(s) Responsible
20 min	Prework	Ask each team member to read the 6 bases of power article	Facilitator
5 min	Welcome and introduction	Remind group of session objectives and group norms Introduce/ review the 6 bases of power	Facilitator
5 min	Individual written reflection	Prompt team members to use journals or a piece of paper to reflect on the following questions. *Think about all the kinds of power that you have and that your team attributes to team members.* • *To what extent do I have each of the 6 bases of power in this team and in the context of this work?* • *What implications does that have for my role and work as a team?* • *What implications does that have for our roles and work outside this team?*	Facilitator Journals/ notebooks

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		• *Which kinds of power do you think might complicate your ability to be both a leader and a learner in this work?* • *In what ways do you imagine your power getting in the way?*	
30 min	Small group discussion	Pair/Small group discussion of individual reflection on each question (4 min per person to share) ***Facilitator note**: The objective of this discussion is to make power dynamics visible. We want to be sensitive to framing and acknowledging power dynamics within the team. It can be helpful for team members with positional power to acknowledge its presence and express that they do not hold different power than other team members within the context of this discussion.* • *It can be a good time to revisit any group norms that exist.* • *Might be helpful to consider the perspective of other roles/ stakeholders who are closer to experiencing power differentials. Be cognizant of the voices that might not be in the room and how you can meaningfully engage them to share their own experiences.* • *Note may be useful to refer back to group norms and underscore creating the conditions and space to share and push.*	Facilitator
2 min	Transition	In Part 1 (if applicable) and earlier in this discussion, we have reflected on how our identities may influence how much power we hold in society more broadly. We have also been reflecting on how our identities may influence how much power we have within our team. Let's bear all of those discussions in mind as we reflect.	Facilitator
5 min	Individual written reflection	Prompt participants to use journals or a piece of paper to reflect on the following questions: • *To what extent do each of my identities give me power in this team and in the context of this work?* • *What implications does that have for our roles and work as a team?* • *What implications does that have for our roles and work outside this team?* • *How might we bring our understanding of team power dynamics into our work together? What steps might we want to take to address the power dynamics regarding decision making, veto power, etc.?*	Facilitator Journals/ notebooks
30 min	Whole group discussion	Full group discussion of individual reflection on each question (2 min per person to share) What agreements or norms might we want to develop based on this conversation in order to foster a culture of inclusion?	Facilitator

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		***Facilitator note**: The objective of this discussion is to make power dynamics visible. We want to be sensitive to framing the role of the people with different roles on the team. Note it may be useful to refer back to group norms and underscore creating the conditions and space to share and push.* *Output from this conversation could include new norms / agreements for working together in ways that promote psychological safety and honor and elevate all voices, regardless of power and identity.* In closing, review any outputs and thank the team for their engagement. Point team to additional resources for further exploration of power dynamics.	

RESOURCES

Additional resources can be found in the Coherence Resource Guide.

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