

Learn Together:

Owning Your Power

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Defining Power

Power, like leadership, has as many definitions as there are people.

We will define it as: *the ability to command or control; to exercise authority and influence.*

Power is often something that we know by how it feels. When it's used well; when it's used against us. If we're inspired by it or oppressed by it.

Power dynamics are playing out consciously and unconsciously at all times.

Reflections

What is your personal definition of power?

How do you relate to the word power? Do you move toward it or avoid it?

Where are you most aware of power dynamics?

Is the context that you have mainly positive and supportive? Negative?

What are examples of ways you've seen power play out in ways that are helpful? Harmful ways?

Do I see power as static and scarce? Do I see it as abundant?

Power Over

This is one form of power, and one that many of us know well because the foundation of society is a power over model. We see it play out in hierarchy within organizations.

Societal privilege creates hierarchy.

Privilege is bestowed upon you by society based on the historical and present-day context of your identity. Defined as unearned favor, power or advantage ascribed because of a specific identity you hold. Also, less likelihood of facing specific challenges because of a specific identity. Those without privilege are systemically penalized.

The identities that hold the most privilege in this society are:

White, cisgender, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, English-speaking, middle-aged, upper middle to upper class, U.S. born. (including passing or presenting as any of these)

Hierarchy by default sets people or things in a specific rank and order - often by levels of importance, authority, or prioritization.

Power Over

Power over is focused on control, self-interest, domination, coercion, and force. It motivates through fear - fear instilled in the other, and that the person who has the power not misstep and lose it. There's a specific authority figure, conscious or unconscious manipulation, and exploitation.

Reflections

Where do I see power over in ways that have been supportive?

Where do I see it in ways that I think are harmful?
In what ways do I wield power over?

How does hierarchy create power over dynamics that create a sense of powerlessness in people with less power?

Homework

Review the org chart and examine where organizational hierarchy and social dynamics due to privilege impact how power is held. And the impact of that dynamic.

Review processes and procedures to see where power over dynamics may unnecessarily be at play. Why are they there? Is there something that people need to be trained better on so you can trust and create more agency and autonomy?

Power With

Power with is shared power, cultivated by relationships and collaborations. Its foundations are rooted in respect, shared power, mutual support, solidarity, influence, empowerment, and collaborative decision making.

Everyone is powerful in their own right.

There's people power & collective action rather than domination. It's based on dialogue, inclusion, negotiation, and shared decision making.

There are shared resources and access to social and financial capital when needed.

People with societal privilege actively work to make sure it doesn't create unjust dynamics.

Reflections

What is most hopeful about power with, and what are the challenges you see around this?

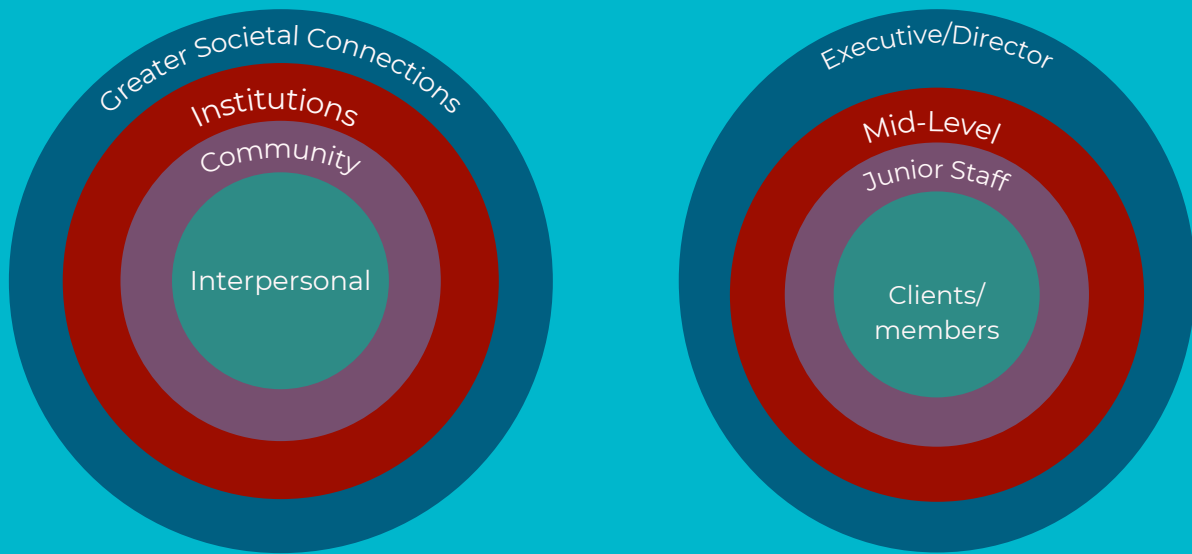
Have you experienced this in your current institution? If you haven't, where would you like to see this implemented? Why there?

Homework

Sphere of Influence Exercise (next page) to examine both your direct influences and indirect influence within your organization

Sphere of Influence

Create your own sphere of influence based on the images below.



The left image is your general sphere, that includes your org, but also outside. The right, you'll create one that's specifically your organization.

Interpersonal levels - your family friends, mentors.

Community level - your neighborhood, state country - faith communities, orgs, co-workers, acquaintances, HOAs, libraries, etc.

Institutional level - what systems like school systems, corps, hospitals, colleges, policing systems, etc.

Greater societal influences - which may include people on social media, and the influence you have in laws being created, policies, etc.

List the people, groups, and institutions located within these spheres. These are folx you may have direct influence over, as well as indirectly influence. (you may need more circles like a Board of Directors).

Who do you impact? Who impacts you?

What are their backgrounds and identities? How does your identity impact how you show up with these people and in these locations?

Power To

Power to is creative power. Prophetic power. Generative power. Our potential. The possibility and actions that lead to creation without domination and coercion. Co-creation and innovation.

Reflections

When was the last time you felt this kind of power within your organization? What was happening?
Who was involved?

Do you feel like you have the agency to create or that there are people or dynamics that stop you from innovating? If you have agency, who encourages you the most? If you feel stuck around this, can you name the dynamics?

Power Within

Power within is your sense of self-worth, self-knowledge. It's about agency and autonomy and your own sense of competence and capacity. There's belief in our own sovereignty, trust in our integrity, and attunement to our desires and our purpose. Empowerment that comes from our existence (not because of societal privilege or a title).

Reflections

When do you feel like you are most empowered?
Who are you most likely to empower?

What trainings or skills or cultural shifts might you or your team need to cultivate more of this kind of power?