

Chair Power : Three Types of Power

Goals

- give participants a theoretical tool to analyze power;
- assist participants in using power-with-others and power-from-within.

Time

30-45 minutes

Special Materials

Four move-able chairs

How it's Done

Here's a lively tool for examining a big subject of power!

Tell participants they are going to get a chance to think about different types of power. Set up a number of chairs in some configuration (such as the figure). Then just ask: "Which chair is the most powerful?"

Get rapid input from participants on which chair they think is the most powerful.

Some ideas to keep in your mind while facilitating:

- There are no rights-or-wrongs
- Encourage diversity ("how about this chair? Why is this chair the most powerful?")
- Encourage and note difference ("so you think this chair is powerful because of THIS? Disagreements?").
- Use brief follow-up questions: "So why is this one powerful?"
- Gets lot of different input from different people
- Try to keep noting themes in the conversation, disagreements (use the 3 types of power [below] as a mental hook): e.g. "Oh, so there are a range of different types of power here." "So one type of power seems to be what people are calling X and another is Y."

To help participants go deeper here are some ways to keep pushing:

- Ask participants to move one chair in such a way as to make it the most powerful or exaggerate its power (you may reset chairs at various points);

- Ask participants to sit in a chair in such a way as to make it the most powerful chair (get four volunteers at a time). Ask them to freeze once they find their position and have the outside observers note what they see ("How did they try to make it powerful?" "What kinds of power do you see here?")

After getting a wide range of options and conversation, introduce the three types of power.

Power-over

- Often how we traditionally think about power - the ability to get someone to do something against their will;
- Using rewards, punishments, manipulation to force someone to do something they do not choose.

Power-with-others

- The ability to influence and take action based on uniting with others;
- The power that comes from community, solidarity, cooperation.

Power-from-within

- The ability to influence and take action based on intention, clarity of vision, or charisma.
- Daw Aung San Suu Kyi explains: "If you have confidence in what you are doing and you are shored up by the belief that what you are doing is right, that in itself constitutes power, and this power is very important when you are trying to achieve something."

Tell a series of stories of nonviolent action and have people in small groups identify what types of power they saw in those stories. Clarify the theory of three types of power (generalize) and help folks examine ways that may clarify theory around nonviolent action and skills they can use that fall under power-with-others and power-from-within [the least appreciated forms of power] (application).

Where this Tool Comes from

Tools adapted and series designed by Daniel Hunter (Training for Change).

Chair Exercise originally from Theatre of the Oppressed as used by Babu Ayindo and Daniel Hunter (see "Theatre of the Oppressed" or "The Rainbow of Desire" by August Boal, available in English).

Three types of power as used by George Lakey adapted from activist/author/witch Starhawk (see "Dreaming in the Dark: Magic, Sex, and Politics", by Starhawk).