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Power Analysis for Social Change: Participatory Learning and Action

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INTRODUCTION

A variety of approaches have been developed over the years by practitioners and academics for understanding and addressing power relations in processes of social change. Methods have been devised for making sense of social and political dynamics, and for identifying strategies that respond to the root causes of inequality and exclusion. Some approaches focus on identifying and mapping actors and their interests, such as political economy analysis; others place more emphasis on exposing the sociological and structural underpinnings of power; and yet others see power as shaped by a continuous interplay of agency and structure. 'Power analysis' in this chapter refers to a set of multidimensional frameworks, from across these traditions, that have been used effectively to understand and shift power through processes of research and action.

The emphasis on participation of those directly affected by power in analysing it varies in these traditions. Some approaches have been created and used by activists, some by social scientists, and others by practitioners and academics working together. Participatory power analysis can be traced, for the most part, to popular education and action research experiences during the 1970s–1980s, and to the subsequent spread of participatory methodologies in international development. Interest in power analysis has grown again in recent years in the face of growing authoritarian rule and closing democratic space in many contexts. Gaining strategic awareness of power, how to resist it, and how to build positive forms of it, are seen as vital in efforts to promote and sustain progressive social change.

The focus of this chapter is on approaches to learning and action developed by activists and practitioner-academics, many inspired by feminist and intersectional understandings of power, and involving people directly in making sense of how power works in their lives, in order to change it. The methods described

are drawn from my facilitation and participatory research and learning experience with civil society organisations, networks, social movements, foundations, governments and universities in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe, and in collaboration with colleagues from whom I have learned a great deal.[2] Together we have designed and led learning processes that support power analysis by change leaders and practitioners – in the form of action research, strategic reviews, training and planning exercises. Some have been one-off events focused on power dynamics in a particular sector, issue or strategy, while others have been learning journeys lasting months and combining face-to-face workshops with methods of reflective practice, or action research projects that have been documented and shared with wider audiences. The frameworks and methodologies have also been used extensively in professional training and university courses.

This chapter emphasises design and facilitation principles behind these learning processes, and the conceptual frameworks applied within them, rather than specific methodologies and tools – which can be found in the references and online searches. The chapter considers ethics and reflexivity within processes of facilitation and learning: without critical reflection on one's own position and power, whether as a facilitator or a participant, power analysis can easily take an external focus on power 'out there' and ignore its operation in our own lives. In my case, as a white, educated man located in Europe and working with institutions largely funded by the global North, I have to consider how power pervades my experience and shapes my cognition, as well as those of the people and organisations with whom I work. Reflexivity is challenging regardless of one's position, but the more so for those of us in privileged groups, geographic regions or organisations. Acknowledging our positionality and biases, and respecting the knowledge and framings of those whom the analysis is meant to benefit, are part of what

makes participation meaningful and ethical – as well as difficult to get right, as participation is by definition power-laden.

The next section of the chapter introduces some of the key concepts and frameworks used in participatory power analysis. Examples are then provided of the processes in which these frameworks can be used, and the chapter concludes with critical reflections on the practice of facilitating power analysis.

FRAMEWORKS OF POWER[3]

Power takes different forms and can be named and explained in multiple ways, making it an 'essentially contested concept' without a commonly shared definition or theory (Lukes, 2005 [1974]: 14). How we perceive and address power depends on what conceptual framings we use to understand and view the world, and what we think drives human and institutional behaviour. This section compares common assumptions about power and their implications for the choice of methods, and introduces some key frameworks used in participatory power analysis.

A guiding principle in using these frameworks is to refrain from imposing them, and rather to inquire with participants about their experiences of power, listening for and respecting their own concepts and definitions. At the same time, understanding the frameworks can help the facilitator to support a relevant and participant-owned analysis, and can be useful for participants as ways of reflecting and making sense of their experiences. The frameworks are best used as points of dialogue. In using them, the goal 'is to work with people to enhance capabilities of what we might call "power literacy", which can then be applied through whichever frameworks or approaches are chosen' (Rowlands, 2020: 155, citing Duncan Green's notion of 'power literacy').

Power is often seen as something tangible that can be held, wielded over others, gained

or lost, usually through political, economic or military contestation. Power is considered as an exercise of *agency* – an expression of the intentions, capacities and actions of people or groups. Political economy analysis (PEA) is concerned with power of this kind, while also considering how actors are enabled or constrained by institutional norms. Other perspectives consider power to be everywhere, embedded in values, discourses and systems of knowledge; here power is used as a lens for understanding societal *structure* or the norms and belief systems behind thought and behaviour. These contrasting views of power are sometimes called *formal* and *informal* power, or are identified on a spectrum from *visible* to *hidden* to *invisible* power. The choice of methods used to analyse power thus often reflects particular assumptions and perspectives. Those focused on *agency* and *formal* or *visible power* lean toward methods for identifying actors, their interests and relationships, while those concerned with *structure* and *informal* or *invisible power* prefer methods that aim to expose and critique the role of socialised norms and beliefs.

The frameworks presented here bridge these perspectives, seeing power as multi-dimensional and as created and reproduced where agency and structure intersect. Yet the distinctions remind us that influencing formal structures and dominant actors may be necessary, but not sufficient on its own, to shift power. Legal and policy changes or replacing leaders may facilitate change, but to be effective these efforts need to be accompanied by less visible efforts to transform internalised norms, attitudes and values – and also to mobilise alternative expressions of power, positive visions and new narratives. At the same time, a focus on consciousness-raising and transforming social norms and beliefs may be ineffective without focused, actor-oriented political strategies. The frameworks here seek to address these multiple dimensions of power and their interconnections.

Power as agency is most often described in negative terms, as the coercive power that some people wield over others. When participants in a workshop are asked to tell stories about their experiences of power, most will describe negative moments of '*power over*' – being dominated or coerced by others. This may be in the form of overt oppression, such as an authoritarian government denying people freedom of movement or expression, punishing them when they step out of line, or restricting what they feel able to say or do. Extreme forms of *power over* exist in conflict situations and totalitarian regimes and when elite groups, security forces or organised crime are prevalent, whether separately or in collusion. Yet *power over* can also be found in liberal political contexts, such as the pressure that gays and lesbians may feel to marry the opposite sex and have children, and the gendered roles and behaviour enforced by patriacrhy: socialised norms are experienced as *power over* particularly when they are weaponised through religious and political ideology.

Building on these diverse understandings of power, a range of frameworks can be used to explore the multiple dimensions of agency and structure, formal and informal power, visible and less visible power, and transformative as well as negative manifestations of power.

Transformative Power

While power is often understood in negative terms – as the 'power over' of domination and control – there are also positive manifestations of power that are essential in processes of social change. When people mobilise to show their governments or employers that they will not tolerate being exploited or abused, they are exercising positive power. When a woman is able to leave a violent husband or to go out to work, or when a person of colour takes action against racial discrimination, they are exercising positive power. Challenging oppressive social norms and abuses call for an understanding of

positive expressions and mobilisations of power. The *transformative power* framework has been developed, under various names, by feminist educators and activists to describe the positive expressions of power that are cultivated in processes of women's empowerment (Bradley, 2020; Miller et al., 2006; Rowlands, 1997; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002). A recent version of the framework describes four interrelated transformative powers: *power to* (the ability to act), *power within* (self-esteem), *power with* (collective action) and *power for* (vision):[4]

> **Power to** refers to *the unique potential of every person to speak, take action, shape her life and world*. Leadership development for social justice provides new skills, knowledge and awareness, and opens up the possibilities of joint action, or *power with* others.
> **Power within** has to do with *a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge*. Grounded in a belief in inherent human dignity, *power within* is the capacity to value oneself, think independently, challenge assumptions, and seek fulfilment.
> **Power with** refers to the collective strength that comes *with finding common ground and community with others*. Power with – expressed in collaboration, alliances and solidarity – multiplies individual talents, knowledge and resources for a larger impact.
> **Power for** has been added as a dimension of transformative power, referring to the combined vision, values and demands that orient social movement work. *Power for* inspires strategies and alternatives that hold the seeds of the world people seek to create.

The *transformative power* framework affirms that power can be positive and that it can be created and used by those who are disempowered. The concepts are often combined in processes of empowerment: we need *power within* in order to act, and *power to* in order to act collectively, while the *power with* of collective action and the *power for* of shared vision strengthens self-esteem and agency (Bradley, 2020; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002). Recognising and nurturing transformative powers is a vital step in power analysis, providing a positive language to describe the latent or potential powers of those who might see themselves, or those labelled by others, as powerless. The framework is used to identify tactical options for designing and sequencing change strategies. People invariably have their own versions of transformative powers, drawing from their histories, mythologies, parables, ancestral origins, religions and cosmovisions.

Faces of Power

A useful framework for power analysis distinguishes between 'faces' of power: *visible*, *hidden*, *shadow* and *invisible power*. First conceptualised as 'three dimensional power' by Steven Lukes (2005 [1974]) in academic debates about political power, the approach was further developed in John Gaventa's 'powercube' (2006, 2020, described below) and by Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller (2002) in their work on citizen action and women's empowerment (see also Miller et al., 2006). These faces describe different forms of domination and control, or *power over* – while also inviting strategic possibilities of subverting these from below. A recent version (adapted here from Bradley, 2020) proposes four dimensions:

> **Visible power** includes the aspects of political power that we 'see': formal rules, structures, institutions and procedures informing decision-making. Those with power use procedures and structures to control the actions of others. *Examples: elections, political parties, Budget, laws, etc.*
> **Hidden power** is exercised when powerful people and institutions maintain influence by setting and manipulating agendas and marginalising the concerns and voices of less powerful groups. *Examples: consultation processes that exclude some voices; setting the agenda behind the scene.*
> **Shadow power** is a more insidious form of hidden power that operates through the collusion

of state actors with criminal groups, paramilitaries and corrupt corporations. *Examples: logging or mining companies that bribe officials or collude with security forces to grab land and resources.*

Invisible power operates when people internalise belief systems created by those with power. Issues are kept away not only from decision-making but from the minds and hearts of people affected by decisions. *Examples: negative stereotypes that limit self-image, voice and influence of certain groups.*

In participatory power analysis, this framework is useful both for identifying how power is being experienced in oppressive contexts, and for developing appropriate responses and strategies of resistance. Each of the *faces of power* has implications for the choice and sequence of actions, both for resisting *power over* and for building *transformative power*, as demonstrated in the *Power Matrix* tool (Bradley, 2020: 110; Miller et al., 2006: 11) introduced below.

It is often easier to engage with *visible* and *hidden power* than with *shadow power* or power that is embedded in social norms. However, ignoring the less visible forms can lead to a misreading of the complex ways in which change happens and can make it harder to identify effective strategies. The *Power Matrix* demonstrates that these faces of power are not only exercised from above, as *power over*; they may also be subverted and exercised from below, as forms of agency. Groups may mobilise their own *hidden power* (setting the agenda, working behind the scenes) or *invisible power* (shaping public opinion, articulating new norms and contrasting narratives).

The links between the *faces of power* and *transformative power (power to*, *power with*, *power within* and *power for)* are evident in empowerment strategies: discovering personal *power within* and collective *power with* through awareness-raising helps people to articulate *power for* and to overcome both *invisible* norms of power and *hidden* forms of bias and exclusion, which can enable people

to exercise their own *power to* act in the face of *visible power*. In participatory power analysis it is helpful to first identify the *faces of power* at work in a particular context before turning to implications for strategy and action. An intermediate step can also be added, to identify positive 'signs of change' – new actors, potential allies and trends that can be aligned with strategically (similar to identifying 'Strengths' and 'Opportunities' in a SWOT analysis).

As with the *transformative power* framework, when using the *faces of power* and the *Power Matrix* in a power analysis, it is helpful to first draw out participants' own experiences and definitions of the forms of power operating in their context, and to build upon their own perspectives and terminology. This can be done in dialogue with the concepts found in the frameworks, but equally participants can be invited to articulate their own typologies and language of power. The concepts presented here have all emerged from particular contexts and experiences and are not always transferable: new experience can yield new understandings.

Shadow power, for example, was added to the *faces of power* framework following workshops in Latin America where participants felt that *hidden power* – the biased influence of powerful interest groups in politics – did not describe the co-optation of state and security actors by organised and violent criminals, or state collusion with narcotic and extractive industries. Scholarship (e.g. Peacock and Beltrán, 2003) on *poder oculto* or *shadow power* has made the framework more relevant to activists dealing with corruption and collusion, such as the rise of paramilitaries, the seizing of Indigenous lands by extractive industries and attacks on journalists and rights defenders.

This challenge of navigating this tension between the power frameworks and people's knowledge and experience surfaced in an action learning process with community activists working on racial justice and migrants' rights in the UK (Hunjan and

Pettit, 2011). As facilitators we were compelled to balance our framings of power with the participants' experience and ways of defining it. Many felt besieged and excluded by wider society. Public and political opinion was anti-immigration, neo-fascists were on the march and being a refugee or asylum seeker was stigmatised. The government discourse of 'community cohesion' pointed a disciplinary finger at minorities for failing to 'cohere' with the rest of British society. As facilitators we hoped to offer some new ways of thinking about power and race to help understand and respond to these realities. But some of the concepts we introduced landed like lead balloons. Our words were resisted, as participants insisted on using their own language to frame their experiences. For example, Afro-Caribbean activists had a well-developed framing of 'mental slavery' and did not find 'invisible power' particularly helpful. Through this experience we learned to listen more to the participants' own language and experiences, and to use our frameworks only where they might enrich the dialogue.

Spaces and Levels of Power

Three additional frameworks consider *where* it is that power is exercised and experienced. Understanding the *spaces* and *levels* of power relations, and how these shape strategic possibilities for resistance or transformation of power, is a vital step in identifying practical entry points for change. In workshops and learning processes, many participants have found the *spaces* and *levels* frameworks particularly useful and relevant for both analysis and strategy.

Public, private and intimate realms of power[5]

This framework is used in gender analysis to explore the ways in which women and men experience and exercise power differently in the public, private or intimate realms of their lives:

> The *public* realm of power concerns one's experience of public interactions such as employment, livelihoods, market activities, participation in public affairs, public social spaces, and role in the community.
> The *private* realm of power includes one's experience of family, relationships, friends, marriage and the household, and is usually defined by the social, cultural and religious norms of these relationships.
> The *intimate* realm of power concerns personal self-esteem, confidence, dignity, relationship to one's own body and reproductive health, and one's sexuality.

For example, a young professional woman may be respected in her place of work, but lack status in her home or community, even in relation to older but less educated women; or the reverse may be true, that she has power in the household but feels marginalised or invisible in public or at work. She may feel more powerful in the public or private realms, but less so in the intimate realm of her relationships and degree of control over her body; conversely, her lack of power in the intimate or private realms may serve to undermine her sense of agency and power in the public realm.

The *public*, *private* and *intimate realms of power* draw attention to the ways in which experiences in particular spaces and moments in time are shaped by – and can reinforce – gender and other socially constructed norms, and their intersection. One's sense of identity, agency and power as defined by age, ethnicity, religion or sexuality may shift from moment to moment according to which realm one is in. This framework sheds light on intersecting personal, familial and cultural sources of identity and power which are too often ignored – even though they are widely experienced.

Closed, invited and claimed spaces[6]

The *spaces of power* framework, and the following one on *levels of power*, have been used in combination with the *faces of power* (above), to create a three-dimensional
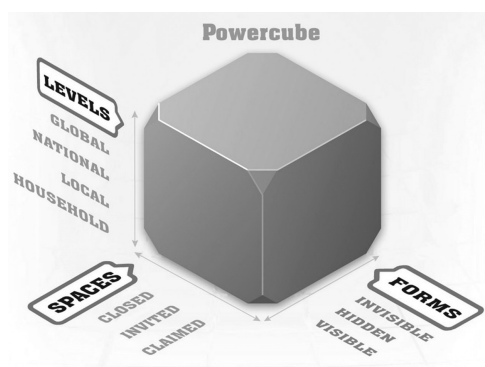
Figure 21.1   Powercube

Source: powercube.net, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK.

analytical tool called the *Powercube* (Gaventa, 2006). The idea of 'space' is widely used in analyses of power, policy and citizen action, often with different meanings. The *Powercube* framework (see Figure 21.1) defines spaces as 'decision making arenas and forums for deliberation and action', as well as spaces that take the form of 'opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives' (www.powercube.net). Spaces can also of course be analysed independently of the other dimensions. The typology of different kinds of spaces can also be expanded and adapted to fit the context.

> Spaces are *closed* when decisions are made behind closed doors – often without even the pretence of extending the opportunities for inclusion. *Examples: government or institutional bodies or meetings not open to the public.*
> Spaces are *invited* when authorities invite people to participate in decision-making processes as citizens, beneficiaries or users. Although these spaces could become opportunities for genuine collaboration, agendas are often predetermined. *Examples: public consultations, government or institutional meetings open to the public.*
> Spaces are *created* or *claimed* when less powerful actors go against or emancipate themselves

from the most powerful and create autonomous spaces for engagement and action. *Examples: street protests, neighbourhood meetings, alliances and networks.*

The *Powercube* has been particularly useful to groups faced with opportunities to engage or participate in various kinds of civic and political spaces, from official consultation exercises, to municipal and community meetings, to development project planning. It has helped less powerful groups understand how power is operating in spaces that may appear to be open and accessible, and to assess entry points, decide when to engage or not, prepare for voice and engagement, and determine when to create their own spaces of deliberation.

Levels of power

Power is increasingly seen as multi-layered and multi-polar; it is found across various levels among state and non-state actors and there are longstanding debates among activists and academics on which levels of power are the most important: personally, locally, nationally, globally, etc. (Gaventa, 2006: 27–28). Power is at work at all these levels and therefore it can be challenging for civil society and ordinary people to assess which levels and entry points to focus on, when and why. There may be trade-offs between engaging at one level over another. Power analysis helps to identify 'political opportunity structures' or openings for influence. This needs to be combined with an analysis of what resources and strategies are required to use that space effectively to achieve change.

The *Powercube* framework recognises that what is going on at all levels is potentially significant, and argues for considering them all, and their interaction. As a starting point these are usually defined as the global, national and local, or alternatively the supra-national, the national and the sub-national levels of power; some have also extended the *Powercube* to include the household level (akin with private domain described above). This spectrum, like

the typology of spaces, can be adapted to create a classification appropriate for each context. For example a power analysis of civil society participation in Colombia identified five kinds of spaces for engagement across seven levels (Pearce and Vela, 2005). The levels may apply to those of national and global governance, or to transnational organisations, corporations, NGOs or social movements. This vertical dimension of power can be analysed as a 'flexible, adaptable continuum, in which each layer interacts with the other, sometimes opening and other times closing opportunities for action'.[7] The *Powercube* has been widely used by academics, activists and researchers, and for both analysis and strategy development (see Gaventa [2020] for a comprehensive review of experience applying the *Powercube*).

DESIGNING AND FACILITATING A POWER ANALYSIS

The above frameworks have been used in diverse ways, including as conceptual tools in social and policy research. Their use in participatory power analysis with communities, organisations and activists can take multiple forms, from one-off strategy sessions or trainings, to more intensive planning or evaluation retreats, to longer-term action learning journeys, to more structured action research projects. Many groups find it useful to bring power analysis into existing processes, as lenses for looking critically at past experience or for exploring future directions. Often the frameworks are applied to a particular issue, social group or sectoral concern, or are used to identify key issues, actors and entry points. An underlying principle in these learning processes is to develop ongoing power-sensitivity and 'power literacy' among those navigating power in their work and activism, and also to develop insights that may be useful to wider audiences, rather than simply facilitating one-off events to

obtain a specific, momentary analysis. The more depth and time afforded for these exercises, using popular education methodologies, the better.

This section briefly introduces ideas for the design and facilitation of power analysis at three levels of intensity: short exercises or workshops; two- or three-day reflective retreats; and action learning processes lasting weeks or months. Whatever the format, it is helpful to engage one or more experienced facilitators and to form a small internal team who will lead the process; to allow time for planning and dialogue; and to keep a reflective and adaptive process going rather than sticking to a predetermined plan. The more thorough the preparation and dialogue, the more scope there will be for quality participation, adaptation and learning. Documentation is also a key consideration, both for institutional learning and memory, and for wider sharing of lessons.

Short Exercises and Workshops

Power analysis can be inserted into a larger review, planning or training process as one stage or dimension of inquiry, through workshops lasting from a few hours to a full day. Given the complexity of power and the range of useful frameworks available, however, short one-off exercises often leave participants up in the air and wanting more. While it is tempting to try to cram power analysis into a longer agenda, such as a community meeting or organisational retreat, it's important to allow time for a decent analysis. If time is short, it's best to keep the process simple and manageable within the time available, so that participants feel they have gained something rather than being left hanging with unresolved issues.

A good short exercise would focus on participants sharing and comparing their experiences of power in relation to the specific issues or challenges faced. For example, participants can be asked to think of a moment

in which they felt powerful, powerless or empowered, and to share this in storytelling pairs. Highlights can be shared in plenary, drawing out critical reflection about what power is, and the different forms it takes. This can be more effective than simply introducing the frameworks. Yet if the facilitator is well versed in the frameworks, it is still possible to identify how power is operating in its various guises, building on the participants' terminology rather than imposing concepts. Visual methods can be very helpful in this process, such as drawing pictures, flow or system diagrams, problem trees, timelines, matrices and stakeholder maps. If time allows these tools can be enriched with a very short exposition, preferably with visual aids such as images or cartoons, of key ideas from the frameworks – in critical and constructive dialogue with the terms used by participants.

It is helpful to close any exercise, however short, with some time to focus on implications of the analysis for strategy and action. In a longer workshop of two to three days, this can be done toward the end of the second day or at the start of the third day; and in a learning journey of a longer duration, this can be done as an entire workshop at a later stage, as elaborated below. A simple version of the *Power Matrix* (below) can be helpful in moving from analysis to strategy. Further short exercises as well as longer workshop and action learning designs can be found in Hunjan and Pettit (2011).

Longer Workshops and Retreats

Workshops or retreats lasting two to three days or longer provide an ideal space for power analysis, whether for staff and directors of an organisation, members of a network or coalition, or community leaders and activists. Ideally, the agenda will not be too full, even if the objectives include review or evaluation of past experience and strategies, or planning for the future; power analysis can provide a useful lens for meeting such objectives in a way that gets to the root causes of challenges faced, and for developing strategies that will address deeper power dynamics.

A simplified example of a longer workshop or retreat design is shown in Figure 21.2. This illustrates design principles and flow rather than a detailed agenda and should be
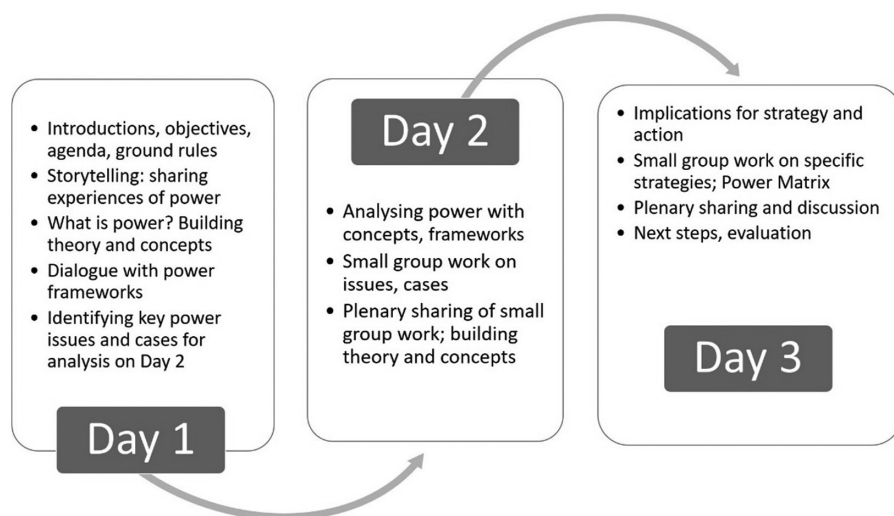
Figure 21.2 Example design for a longer workshop or retreat

adapted according to the workshop objectives. The flow of a retreat or multi-day workshop works well if it is not rushed, and if time is given to building trust and creating a shared understanding of how power is experienced in participants' efforts to promote social change. Ideally the process will be creative and engaging, using storytelling, visual methods and role play exercises in combination with verbal and rational stages of analysis.

The workshop or retreat design will typically allow a full day to share and compare stories of power, to relate these to the frameworks, and to begin building understandings of power that make sense to participants. The second day can be used to deepen the analysis and apply the concepts articulated by participants (as well as those in the frameworks) as a language to discuss power. If the group is large and diverse, it can help at this stage to break into smaller groups dealing with similar issues, dynamics, or levels of engagement, and then bring the groups' findings together in a plenary session. However, it helps to avoid long feedback sessions reading from flipcharts: focus instead on sharing 'aha moments' and use creative methods of feeding back, like visual diagrams or dramatisations.

At the end of the second day, or during the morning of the third day, exercises can be introduced that explore broad implications for strategy, saving more detailed action planning for the second half of the third day (if desired). This design can be stretched for workshops or retreats lasting more than three days; the principle is to use the first half or two thirds of the time to unpack, problematise and conceptualise power, and to refrain from jumping too quickly to implications for action, even if this creates uncertainty by the end of the second day. Dissonance can deepen learning, the more so if participants are able to relax and sleep on it.

The *Power Matrix* is a useful tool for moving from analysis to strategy in workshops (see Table 21.1). The example provided here is only an illustration, and can be adapted as a handout to help participants think about the forms of power at work in their context and to identify implications for strategy and action in relation to each of these. In this version, the strategies are usefully presented at two levels: for resisting *power over* of various forms, and for building *transformative power* from below (creating *power to*, *power within*, *power with* and *power for*). A simplified blank version of the matrix can also be used, or replicated on flipchart paper, so that individuals or small groups can fill in their own examples and strategies for change, then share and discuss these in plenary.

Another helpful step that can be added to this exercise is to identify positive 'signs of change' – the actors, trends and alliances that are potentially working in favour of transformation. Social change is rarely the outcome of a single group or organisation, and finding systemic links with other forces can lead to more effective strategies. This activity can be done after identifying the forms and examples of power (the two left-hand columns in Table 21.1) and before considering strategies (the two right-hand columns), by adding a middle column for 'signs of change'. Experience using the *Power Matrix* has shown that it helps for groups to first work vertically on the left-hand columns (identifying forms and examples of power), and then move horizontally from left to right by row: identifying signs of change and strategies that correspond to specific kinds of power dynamics. Participants can then examine the whole and identify systemic relationships in order to prioritise and sequence strategies.

Learning Journeys

Learning journeys, also known as learning trajectories or action learning sets, can take many forms and may last anywhere from a few weeks to several months to a year. The design can be similar to a workshop or retreat, but with deeper exploration of issues

Table 21.1   The Power Matrix

MECHANISMS	EXAMPLES	RESPONSES AND STRATEGIES	
How power over operates to exclude and privilege	*Power over*	*Challenge and Resist Power Over*	*Build and Create Our Own Transformative Power*
Visible: Making & Enforcing the Rules Presidents, legislatures, courts, ministries, police, military, United Nations, World Bank, chambers of commerce) Instruments: Policies, laws, constitutions, budgets, regulations, conventions, agreements, and enforcing mechanisms, etc.	Biased laws/policies Decision-making structures that favour the elite and powerful and exclude others Unrepresentative governance bodies Lack of transparency and accountability Laws not upheld / gap between law and practice	Demand accountability to existing laws and agreements using advocacy, lawsuits, direct action, petitions, etc. Challenge inequitable policies and practices Expose corruption and ties to hidden power Impact elections	**Impact Decisions and Governance: Laws, Policy, Judicial and Spending** Mobilise community power for accountability Leverage relationships with allies in key positions Engage in legal, political and judicial advocacy Reform institutions Shape policies and practices
Hidden / Shadow: Setting the Agenda Political control over what and who is part of decision-making Exclusion and delegitimisation of others through 'unwritten rules', intimidation, misinformation and co-optation Examples: industry suppression of climate science	Activist leaders are discredited as trouble-makers or outsiders and their issues as elitist, impractical, anti-tradition, etc. (e.g. LGBT rights / labour rights are 'special' interests) Media do not consider these groups' issues newsworthy	Research and expose hidden power actors and their influence and interests Expose and discredit shadow actors Develop strategies to protect ourselves from threats and backlash	**Build Our Own Movement Infrastructure** Build collective power of communities Strengthen movement leadership and organisation Build strategic alliances Participatory research to legitimise our issues Use alternative media and communications
Invisible: Shaping Meaning, Values and What's 'Normal' Socialisation: Cultural norms, values, practices, and customs shape people's understanding of their needs, rights, roles, and normalise inequities and the status quo Control of information and political narrative to 'manufacture consent' and silence dissent Dominant ideologies validate social realities	**Socialisation/oppression** Belief systems (e.g. patriarchy) cause internalisation of inferiority, powerlessness, shame, anger, resignation, etc. Dominant ideologies and narratives in popular culture, education and media reinforce bias and inequality, and stifle other ways of thinking (e.g. women blame themselves for abuse) Crucial information is misrepresented or withheld	Challenge and disrupt repressive social norms and traditions Question taboos and use of shame/guilt to control Name and expose underlying interests and values driving political narratives Draw attention to contradictions and impacts of invisible power Understand fear as a tool of control and its impact on our bodies	**Create Consciousness and Our Own Narrative** Foster critical consciousness, self-esteem and solidarity Amplify non-dominant voices, ideas, views and beliefs Influence and inform public discourse, attitudes and behaviour Creatively produce media and forms of cultural intervention Cultivate alternative ideas and practices

Source: Bradley (2020: 111–112, Table 3.1.1), which is adapted with permission from 'The Power Matrix' in VeneKlasen and Miller (2002: 50) and Miller et al. (2006: 11). The two left-hand columns are adapted from Miller et al. and the two right-hand columns are Bradley's.

and time for reflective practice – applying the power frameworks and change strategies with support from peers and mentors and reflecting on this experience – both to help the participants themselves improve their practice, and to share findings with wider audiences concerned with the same issues. Four stages can be used in the design rather than three: (a) introducing and exploring power; (b) power analysis of specific cases and issues; (c) moving from analysis to strategy and action; and (d) critical reflection on practice.

As summarised in Hunjan and Pettit (2011: 6), key design features of this approach include:

• Full-day workshops, away from the day-to-day organisation challenges, provide a space for deeper reflection and thinking.

• The model allows for people to work together over a longer period of time and therefore gain the trust to support each other to solve different issues.
• One-to-one mentoring provides an opportunity for further reflection and time to think about how to put new ways of thinking about power into practice.
• The learning is sustained over a longer period of time and therefore is more likely to be embedded into organisational thinking and behaviour.
• Documentation, in creative formats, can be built into the process so that the learning can be shared more widely, extending its impact beyond the participants.

A sample design for a one-year learning journey is shown in Table 21.2. This can be shortened to a period of several weeks or months, with fewer workshops, but from experience it

Table 21.2   Example of a learning journey

Activity	Objectives	Period
Recruitment of participants	Select organisations, groups and participants, ensure the commitment of all participants to the process	Months 1–2
One-to-one mentoring sessions with participants	Introduction, clarify objectives and expectations	Months 2–3
Workshop 1: Framing workshop	Introductions, objectives, expectations Develop as a team Storytelling, introduction to power Build theory in dialogue with power frameworks Clarify the process and discuss next steps	Month 3
One-to-one mentoring: Problem identification and analysis	Understanding the issue, challenge or power dynamic that each participant has chosen to focus on Challenging assumptions about change strategies	Month 4
Workshop 2: Power concepts and frameworks in practice	Revisit participants' theories and power frameworks and their use in problem analysis and strategy Power Matrix or similar exercise for analysing power and implications for strategy and action Explore key moments/milestones	Month 4
One-to-one mentoring: progress and review	Feedback Support for forward strategy and planning Detailed feedback on progress	Months 5–6
Workshop 4: Progress workshop	Strategy to action Peer support to address problems and issues that may have arisen Articulate progress through a power lens	Month 8
Workshop 5: Synthesis	Documenting and reflecting on learning journeys Explore next steps	Month 11
One-to-one mentoring: Exit	This could be used as an independent evaluation, an opportunity to co-produce documentation	Month 12

Source: Adapted with permission from Hunjan and Pettit (2011: 53).

is helpful to allow sufficient time between workshops for practice and reflection, rather than rushing it. It is advisable to guide participants to select one or two specific things they would like to try out in their practice, rather than trying to manage a comprehensive set of issues, objectives or strategies. Keeping the process simple and manageable for busy practitioners is key: the point is to support them to reorient or improve what they are already doing, rather than burdening them with an entirely new activity. Learning Journeys are particularly well suited to participatory power analysis that is facilitated remotely, using digital technologies.

CONCLUSION: METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Facilitating a good power analysis is less about mastering specific tools, methods or frameworks, and more about supporting participants to engage continuously, creatively and intuitively with power in their own lives and issues, exploring different lenses and understandings, and connecting the analysis with action for change (Rowlands, 2020: 153). Power analysis can helpfully be combined with a focus on articulating a robust and systemic theory of change (see e.g. Retolaza Eguren, 2011). A strategic focus on change and action gives the analysis purpose and direction and helps one to 'avoid getting lost in detail or side-tracked into fascinating but not immediately relevant analysis' (Rowlands, 2020: 155).

The power frameworks are most useful as a backdrop for analysis, introduced in dialogue with participants or not at all, rather than being imposed. In my experience facilitating workshops and learning journeys on power, participants have often found they have to 'translate' before they can use the processes in their organisations or communities, and to select more relevant language, images, stories and examples that people can

relate to. The same conclusion was reached in a power analysis of healthcare challenges with Indigenous communities in Guatemala:

> we realised that it was wrong to assume that people in rural indigenous municipalities need frameworks and tools to understand what power is and to elicit information about it. [We] became aware that although we meant well with our participatory tools, they might in fact be causing a disempowering effect on the community participants by undervaluing their extensive experiential knowledge about power and disempowerment. (Flores, 2020: 183)

Workshops and action learning processes can best provide safe spaces where participants can think critically and question the attitudes and norms that reproduce power dynamics, whether racism, patriarchy or other forms of oppression. Power frameworks are more appreciated when used creatively and iteratively with people's own experience and language – helping them to identify the 'invisible power' of socialised attitudes and beliefs and the 'power within' of self-respect. The concepts may help participants to see their own power and disempowerment differently. But adapting these ideas and methods for use with the communities they work with can prove difficult, as intellectual concepts can be alienating or abstract. Real meaning may not take shape until moments of action, which underscores the benefits of longer action learning processes.

Where personal realisations about power occur in these learning processes, something more profound is at work than a conceptual reframing of assumptions. Moments of genuine insight usually come through having built relationships of trust, dialogue and communication, creating safe spaces for conversation, allowing time to face contradictions and express feelings, and enabling scope for adaptation and ownership. Visual images, stories, role play and metaphors can often provide better entry points than verbal theories, or at least be vital complements to more literal analysis. Learning works best where it is mutual and collective rather than seeking to change

individual mindsets, and where it is experiential and enactive, realised through implementation and reflective practice. Facilitators can bring creativity and dialogue into the learning process, welcoming people to use their own power language, and avoid getting caught in the 'power' of the frameworks.

Power analysis as a learning process does not have to end with the participants themselves. The discoveries and insights gained through participatory power analysis can be documented and shared in creative ways with others facing the same or similar challenges, and can inspire further inquiries that take the analysis and strategy further. Learning journeys and action research that include good documentation in multiple formats are more likely to have these ripple effects than one-off retreats and workshops. Forming networks of exchange and communities of practice among power analysis participants can also amplify and deepen the learning, and help to align theories and strategies of change.

Notes

1   The author is grateful to John Gaventa for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
2   Among the many people whose work has inspired these frameworks and approaches are Lisa VeneKlasen, Valerie Miller, Alexa Bradley and their many colleagues in Just Associates; Jo Rowlands and Irene Guijt at Oxfam GB; John Gaventa, Rosemary McGee, Andrea Cornwall, Patta Scott-Villiers, Alex Shankland, Mariz Tadros, Rosalind Eyben, Zander Navarro, Robin Luckham, Katy Oswald, Marjoke Oosterom and Helen Dixon at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex; Helena Bjuremalm, Stina Karltun and Maria Ruohomäki at the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), colleagues at Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and staff in numerous development NGOs.
3   This section is adapted and updated from Pettit (2013).
4   Abridged from Bradley (2020: 108). Concepts of *power within*, *power with* and *power to* build on Rowlands (1997: 126–127) and these definitions are adapted by Bradley from Miller et al. (2006: 6). Definition of *power for* is Bradley's, inspired by Just Associates (www.justassociates.org).

5   This framework is based on the work of gender scholars, practitioners and activists and can be found in VeneKlasen and Miller (2002: 51).
6   This framework was developed by John Gaventa, Andrea Cornwall and the Participation, Power and Social Change team at IDS; this presentation of spaces is adapted with permission from www.powercube.net with thanks to John Gaventa. See also Gaventa (2006).
7   See *Powercube* at www.powercube.net/analyse-power/levels-of-power/linking-power-vertically/

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