

Learning activity

## Playing with Power Abilities

**TIME:** 60 mins

**LEARNING AIMS:**

- Understanding the different power abilities
- Identifying with power abilities
- Abilities to analyse groups and their respective power abilities
- Understand the ecology of power and how one is positioned within.

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:** Ideally this exercise is done with existing groups.

**PREPARATION AND MATERIALS:** Prepare a gallery set up with the 12 different power abilities and definitions as well as pictures and maybe descriptions from respective struggles. Additionally, have a circle set up for the plenary.

**FRAMING:**

Power abilities operate alongside each other and in the aforementioned ecology of power. We see the categories as useful to assess and build power more systematically if that is in a social movement context, a wider coalition alliance or at the workplace level. Assessing the primary ecological function of an actor such as an organisation within a movement, allows for agency and strategic thinking. Additionally, assessing a couple of requisite power abilities and maybe briefly analysing those that need to be developed, is useful to build further power, actualize their function in the ecology of social movements and build alliances transversally and transnationally.

Over the course of this activity, participants are to work with people from their initiative and guest community in order to assess their power-abilities. The purpose of this activity is to provide reflection of existing strength and weaknesses. What are these? Which are most critical to develop to satisfy your ecological function?

**FACILITATION:**

**Step 1. Gallery Walk**

People walk around and explore the different power abilities

**Step 2. Mapping exercise (encourage people to scan the room)**

Stand where your group is best at (primary ecological function)

Stand where your group is worst at?

Stand where your group is currently improving on?

Is what you are good at also giving you power - if so how?

**Step 3. Open Question in groups**

In groups of 3, each group is associated with a power ability and invited to dive deeper into it, looking into the case studies and answering the questions for their respective movement.

Is what you are good at also giving you power - if so how?

**Step 4. Groups match**

This part can either be done by proposing a hypothetical scenario and each group sharing how their function would intervene to create change.

Alternatively it can also be constructed in a way that invites groups to collaborate with other abilities and then oppose and share the shortcomings of the other group.

**Step 5. Debriefing**

Final debriefing and reflection exercise on own groups function.

- What is the function of your organisation in the movement ecology and which power are you seeking to develop where and when=
- What do you still need to actualise your power?
- What are concrete ways to collaborate right now to actualise your power?
- Is there anyone here that it would be good to talk to?

***Conclusion and takeaways***

As a conclusion emphasise that power abilities operate alongside each other within an ecology of power. Assessing and analysing power abilities helps in building power systematically within social movement contexts, wider coalition alliances. Reflection on existing strengths and weaknesses is essential for identifying critical areas for development. Collaboration and transversal/transnational alliances are crucial for building power effectively.

**SOURCE:** European Alternatives, Adaptation from Marshall Ganz, Daniel Guitierrez

## LEARNING RESOURCES

### POWER ABILITIES

1. **Structural Power:** Ability to withhold labour (worker centred action) and/or disrupt production (also possible in other ways including direct action etc.). [One example](#) would be the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and 2016 Summer Olympics in Brazil, where workers built structural power by threatening with strike during the build up to the prestigious events and succeeded in winning significant wage gains and other demands which were presented to the government ([Case Study Brazil](#)).
  - How many members are regularly contacting peers about shared concerns?
  - How organised is the group? How easy is it to take collective decisions?
  - How distributed is the delegation structure (how well are tasks being distributed downwards and outwards)?
  - How often are members participating in initiative social events?



Mario Tama/Getty Images

2. **Associational Power:** Ability of workers to organise and act collectively. The power comes from the “subjects” willingness to act in alignment with collective action. In Uganda after years of declining numbers of formal workers in the transport sector, the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers’ Union started to organise with informal transport workers, gaining over 60,000 members, eventually being able to negotiate for better wage and working conditions ([Case Study Uganda](#)). Similar associational power success was the case of the Mechanics Union in Peru in 2016 ([Case Study Peru](#)).
  - What associations (sport, religious, community, etc.) are workers part of outside of work?
  - How involved are people in the local community?
  - How connected are you with decision makers, journalists and media structure?
  - Proportion that attends meetings?
3. **Institutional Power:** Ability to use collective action for better contracts or improved regulation or laws. Examples of institutional power include the winning of policy

changes for example gender or environmental reform, for example the wins of the [Bolivian indigenous movements](#) which partly led to the election of the first indigenous president who then advocated for constitutional reforms. Another example would be the [Asian Peasant's coalition](#) that engaged in advocacy and successfully influenced agrarian reform, land rights and food sovereignty across Asia. A labour success on institutional power from India was, where street vendors were recognized as contributors to the economy, which was followed by a landmark legislation, which gave them legal protection, training and more ([Case Study India](#)).

4. **Societal Power:** Ability to win allies for their goals with wider coalitions and actors. One example would be the coalitions that formed around [marriage equality](#) or the Czech trade union confederation, who garnered public support with a mobilisation campaign that was popular and eventually led the company to meet their demands ([Case Study Czech Republic](#)).
5. **Disruption Power:** Ability to withdraw cooperation in ways that create systemic disruption. Kinds of actions relate to strikes, blockades, boycotts, or obstruction of processes. Example: The classic example would be the [Montgomery Bus Boycotts](#) with Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. or the [boycott of South African goods](#) during the apartheid regime.
  - Does your initiative build organizational capacities around particular structures or social groups that are systemically relevant? Which ones?
  - Does your initiative have the capacities, right now, to disrupt systemically relevant structures? Which ones? In what ways? For how long?
  - Does your initiative have funds to deal with repression and counter-attacks?
6. **Cultural Power:** Ability to influence or shape authority over practices, cultural institutions and representations, by shaping beliefs, values, norms, rituals and identities. Cultural power operates through the production, dissemination and consumption of cultural products that shape collective meaning and experiences. Examples include Black Lives Matter and the Feminist Movements, that have shifted perspectives culturally through art, music, public representation and media discourse.
  - Do you have journalistic or media contacts?
  - Does your group have any cultural practises?
  - Does your group have a network to those working in more artistic institutions or organisations?
7. **Reproductive Power:** Ability to build (counter) institutional structures that can maintain the collective lives of workers, autonomously from capital. Movements here include those that build structures that allow for movements to be more self-sustained, which for example include implementing structures of care and learning in the feminist movement or building alternative structures for reproduction in the agroecology movement.

- Does your organisation have any form of solidarity fund or financial support system?
  - Does your organization routinely organize social and community events?
  - Do you have conflict resolution structures? By what practices/structures do you resolve conflict? Have they been useful?
  - Do you have any structures in place that serve against discrimination within your organisation?
8. **Narrative Power:** Ability to shift, circulate and maintain discursive frames, shape common sense and make meaning. Examples of a campaign can include the MeToo Campaign, but also the global narratives around climate justice and the 1.5° or movements fighting for independence from colonial regime.
- What are concrete issues your organization is fighting against and how is it attempting to reframe the issues to provide new frames of understanding?
  - How are you connecting this frame to the ways in which workers understand the issues?
  - How and with what means are you circulating frames beyond your circles and scenes?
  - Are frames developed by your initiative being circulated in positive light throughout media outlets? How often and how many?
9. **Mobilising Power:** Ability to bring people together to act collectively, in a unified and coordinated manner. Historical moments include the Women's March on Versailles in 1789 and the Anti-Vietnam War protests in the 1960s and 1970s. Today Black Lives matter can be classified as a movement with strong mobilising ability.
- How easy is it for you to get people out on the streets?
  - Who or where does your mobilising power lie?
  - What would it take to mobilise communities that are currently not participating in your events/ campaigns/ marches?
10. **Decision-Making Power:** Ability to build by inserting allies or partners in key decision-making roles across workplaces, institutions or governmental bodies. [Barcelona en Comú](#) is an example. Others include independence movements taking over governments or [new indigenous representation](#) in governments.
- What connections does the initiative have to people who are decision-makers?
  - Through which people do you think you could access decision makers?
  - How are you perceived by decision makers as a group?
11. **Knowledge Production Power:** Ability to learn, generate, retain and circulate knowledge of resistance and analytical frameworks to assess it.
- Is rank-and-file attempting to change any legal structures through campaigning? From your perspective, which laws would be most beneficial?
12. **Affective Power:** Ability to influence others emotions, feelings, moods etc. and thereby shaping their attitudes, behaviours and perceptions. It often works through

the power of emotional persuasion, empathy, resonance and means of storytelling, rhetoric, imagery and interpersonal relations. Examples of movements with affective power as their primary function are

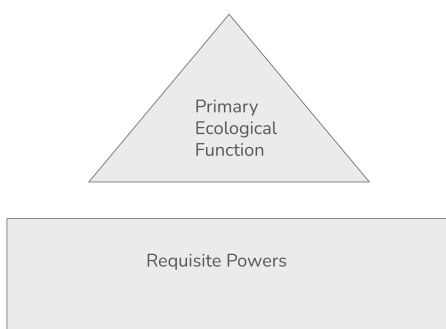
- How good are you in communicating emotions externally?
- How
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**Source:** Adaptation from Marshall Ganz, Daniel Guitierrez

### Resources

### Systems of Power

Seeing this, and making assessments of the actors' primary function in this power system, develops our own sense of agency and allows for our movements to engage in clearer strategic thinking. Additionally, determining the requisite power abilities associated with an actors' function, is useful to actualize our role in the system of power and to build alliances transversally and transnationally between actors who have other functions.



This overview does not only allow you to assess your power abilities but is also useful for the next section, assessing different flows of transnationalism and how power acts within

them. We recommend this [learning activity](#) to further explore and assess power abilities and their ecological function in the movement with participants.

The next section covers examples of transnational flows and we have two guiding questions that will guide through the next section.

- Where are the transnational flows oppressive and where emancipatory, or somewhere inbetween?
- Where can transnationalism become a practice of liberation or where can we intervene to re-claim transnationalism as a practice and method directed at the good for all?

The framework also invites you to go a step further and think about how the system can be challenged. What are the groups and which powers do they need to challenge the flows of capitalism and goods? Thinking about movements in the past and present, ask yourself:

- Which power abilities do they have, which elements of the system do they challenge, and which function do they play in the wider ecology of actors involved in the practice?
- How can groups collaborate more effectively, acknowledging their functions and strengths more explicitly? Who are they up against today?

Assessing the different powers at play in this system, we ask you to think about:

- Who are the people that know most about flows of information?
- At what moment are we as people and communities empowered and disempowered in the transnational flows of information?
- Where do you see potential for intervention, which group or movement comes to mind that has intervened, interrupted or transformed flows of information before?
- Which power abilities do these groups have and which ones do they need?
- Where is your group at, in awareness and practices around oppressive flows of information. What are the experiences and examples?

-> Learn more on digital security and protecting yourself [here](#) and [here](#)

Assessing the different powers flows in this system, we ask you to think about:

- Who is empowered and disempowered in the ways that we currently see the world?
- How are you engaging with indigenous practices?
- How has the non-human world influenced your groups ways of acting?
- At what moment are we as people and communities empowered and disempowered by extending our thinking to other realities?

- Where do you see potential for intervention these days?  
How will this field change with the availability of the internet and the growth of AI.
- Where do you see potential for intervention, which group or movement comes to mind that has intervened, interrupted or transformed ways of interacting with the ecology before?
- Which power abilities do these groups have and which ones do they need?

Assessing the different powers at play in this system, we ask you to think about:

- What are the power abilities of the actors from the right when they work transnationally?
- What is the difference between transnationalism from the right and transnationalism for the left?
- Who is defining the access to what transnationalism means and where are borders and restrictions drawn?
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The framework also invites you to go a step further and think about how the system can be challenged. Think about social movements and groups who work across and against border regimes.

- Which power abilities do they have, which elements of the system do they challenge, and which function do they play in the wider ecology of actors involved in the practice?
- How can groups collaborate more effectively, acknowledging their functions and strengths more explicitly? Who are they up against?