Product Leaders' Guide to Power

What comes to mind when you hear "power"?

Power is neither good nor bad.

Power (working definition)

Power is the ability to change other people's behavior or outcomes

Influence is power in motion

Reasons to understand power

- Without a working knowledge of power, it's very likely you'll get blindsided
- Under a power lens, a different set of things becomes possible
- If you are unaware of your power, it's likely you'll harm other people
- If you aren't conscious of power, it's likely your reactions will be ruled by assumptions like:
    - Power is zero-sum
    - Building power is shady
    - If you take power out of the equation, the best argument can win.

5 original bases of social power (French and Raven)

1. **Legitimate (Structural)** - power granted by a particular location in a structure
2. **Reward** - ability to grant something of value
3. **Expert** - ability to assert answers about domain of expertise
4. **Referent** - ability to influence based on admiration or respect
5. **Coercive** - control based on threat

5 additional bases of power

1. **Informational** - organizational know-how and ability control information flows
2. **Network** - power from depth and strength of relationships and interrelationships
3. **Centrality** - visibility, either structural or physical
4. **Framing** - power to define problem space, constrain options, etc.
5. **Agenda** - pulling attention to the place of your choosing

Product example 1:
Many product managers have **legitimate power** to decide priority of work.

Product example 2:

A product manager may have **reward power** to, say, bring a dev to a conference.

Product example 3:
The potential to share information from a closed strategy session could be considered **informational** or **reward** power

Product example 4:
Amplifying a concern raised from within a dev team might be a use of **agenda** power

I like to think of it like this:

When you roll the dice on an influence attempt, how likely is it to work?

That's power.

Power in conversations

Exec walks into a room, everyone falls silent

Meeting owner starts the meeting

First item on the agenda was from Anji

Anji presents data

Ben points out a limitation of Anji's data

Anji jumps in quickly as Ben seems to be finishing

The meeting owner asks Anji not to cut Ben off

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Exercises of power

Culture-dependent

Key points

- Power is neither good nor bad, but it is always there influencing outcomes.

- You have choices over how to grow (or shrink) and use your power and how to grow power in others

Inspiration and resources

The Bases of Social Power (1959), John French and Bertram Raven
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215915730_The_bases_of__social_power/

Power: A Radical View (2004), Steven Lukes

Acting with Power (2020), Deborah Gruenfeld

The new concepts of power? Power-over, power-to and power-with (2020), Pamela Pansardi
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350807403_The_new_concepts_of_power_Power-over_power-to_and_power-with

Becoming a Leader in Product Development (2021), Ebenezer Ikonne

Guided reflections on privilege and power

Starting with Ourselves: Reflecting on Power, Gender, and Violence online course
https://learn.prevention-collaborative.org/starting-with-ourselves-reflecting-on-power-gender-and-violence/

Social Identity Wheel Activities
https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/social-identity-wheel/
https://www.bu.edu/diversity/resource-toolkit/social-identity-wheel-activity/

Thank you!!!

And thanks to conflux **for Miro access**

Feedback is extremely welcome!

Please feel free to...

Post stickies anywhere on this board

What resonated? What didn't? What felt conspicuously absent? How could it have been made better for *you*?

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About today's session...

- The purpose of today's session is **reflection**, individually and together

- In today's session you'll be **invited** to participate, but there is no expectation or requirement.

- **Take** what is useful to you. **Leave** what is not.

- Please **do not share anyone else's stories** outside without permission.

Exercise 1: Reflecting on your own position in power

Societal privilege

Gender, race age, ability, economic status, etc.
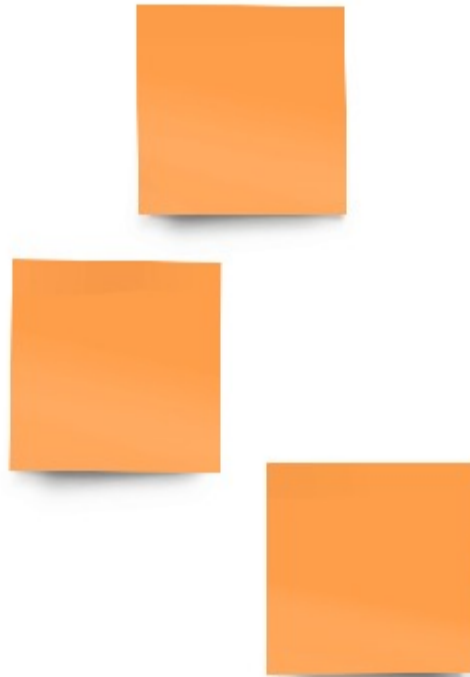
have power	don't have power

Recommended post-workshop

Role-based power

Power to call meetings, make decisions, propose work, etc.

have power	don't have power

Built power

Relationships, reputation, trust, etc.

have power	don't have power

Suggested self-facilitation: 3x3, then open mic
First, introduce yourselves and identify a timekeeper. Then

1. (3 minutes) **Quietly consider** the role-based and built power you have in your current or most recent role. What power do/did you have? What are/were the limitations? Take your own notes, but do not add to the board yet.
2. (3 minutes) **Participant round-robin** In turn, each participant adds a note about a form of power they have or don't have and explains it.
3. (3 minutes) **Group discussion**, what stands out to you from seeing these together?

Then, **free discussion**. If you find conversation slowing, perhaps consider
Where do you see opportunities to build healthy power?
Where are the risks of misuse for the power you have?