Power Mapping Your Organization

Power mapping is a tool often used by advocacy groups to analyze how they might acquire influence by drawing on those who can help them. In this context, power maps are generally drawn around a particular objective or problem.

Power mapping can be a tool for organizations who are committed to workplace fairness and justice. By identifying sources of power in the organization, a secondary analysis can identify the degree to which power is gendered, or if certain gender identities corollate to certain kinds of power.

The analysis can be done on a general basis, or can be done by analyzing a recent significant decision made in the organization (actions around COVID 19 are pertinent in many organizations right now.)

Instructions for Team Activity

Usually done in 2-3 sessions

Using a recent significant decision or proceeding generally, have each member of the team list the eight people they view as having the most power or influence in the organization, ranked from most to least power. Make sure to review the power types to include all forms of power.

Share the lists with the group and note agreement and disagreement regarding who is on the list and how they are ranked.

To the extent there is strong agreement on certain people, list their names on a whiteboard and put next to it their average ranking.

If there are people only on one list, or on a small minorities list, those who chose those individuals can make their case, including the types of power they have. Use consensus or voting to include or exclude from the final list, which can include ten people.

Put each person's name on a Post-It or index card, with person number 1 having the largest post it. Now begin to map the paths of influence among the top 8-10 people. The heavier the line, the stronger the influence. Also, turn the lines into arrows to show the direction of influence.

Finally, begin to identify the influence or power these people assert beyond the top 8-10. You can build as large a network as you deem necessary, based on the size of your organization and the breadth of your stakeholders. The network map should continue until everyone doing the exercise has found their place on the map. This can be done as "homework" between sessions, and once again sharing work and building consensus on the map is part of the exercise.

Now, do an analysis – what are the relevant identities of those with the most power? What identities are missing? Is the kind of power asserted different based on identity? To what extent did you identify power over vs. power with? What story does your map tell about your organization?

Debrief the exercise. How do people feel about their place on the map, if any?   What can be done with what you have learned?