

## **Introduction:**

This lesson challenges participants to consider the complexity of power dynamics and how they affect their professional, academic, and/or personal interactions. In this activity, they will analyze a conflict they had with someone using power as a lens, considering the ways in which power might have affected how they and the other individual reacted as well as the outcome of the conflict.

## **Note on Facilitation:**

There are many ways to organize this activity – with or without advanced preparation; as an individual reflection, maybe even written; as a discussion in pairs, small groups, or with a whole group; as a discussion that moves back and forth between smaller groups and the large group, etc. However you organize it, participants are likely to gain much by hearing each other's responses to the questions under #3.

## **Objectives:**

As a result of this reflection, participants will be able to:

1. Analyze the power dynamics involved in a conflict they experienced.
2. Reflect on how they think about power during their everyday interactions with others.
3. Consider how they might approach future interactions with power dynamics in mind.

## **Time:**

1 hour

## **Group Size:**

Entire group

## **Materials:**

Power Differential Analysis Instructions (in [Downloads](#))

## **Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:**

- Minimization
- Acceptance

## **AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:**

### Cultural Self-Awareness:

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

### Openness:

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

## Other Skills:

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

## Participant Activity Instructions:

1. Think back to a conflict that you've had with someone. It could be a conflict within your professional career (with a supervisor, supervisee, co-worker, etc.), in your academic career (with a professor/instructor, a peer, etc.), or in your personal life (with a family member, a friend, etc.).
2. Analyze that conflict using the following questions:
  - a. What was the power dynamic involved in that conflict (i.e., where did you have more and where did you have less power than the other person involved)?
    - i. How do social identities (age, ethnicity) impact power? Organizational roles? Knowledge of topic? Emotionality? Location (home turf vs others)? If other people are present? If you feel your perspective/belief system is marginalized in some way?
  - b. What role did power play in that particular conflict?
    - i. In what ways did power affect how you reacted to the conflict?
    - ii. In what ways did power influence how the other person reacted to the conflict?
    - iii. How do you think power affected the outcome of the conflict?
  - c. What if the power dynamic were different? For example, what if the roles were switched or the two of you each understood your power in the situation differently?
    - i. What if one of those factors changed?
  - d. What if you had used a different strategy to address the conflict? For example, maybe you initially tried to avoid the conflict. What might have happened if you instead acknowledged it and talked with this person right away?
  - e. Is there a way that you could or should shift the power dynamic intentionally or strategically? (Could be granting more power to yourself or the other person)
  - f. Optional follow-up question: What does power actually mean? Is it agency? Is it control?
3. Then, reflect on the following, more general questions about conflict:
  - a. Is power something that you normally think about when approaching everyday interactions? Why or why not?
  - b. In what ways do your cultural and personal values affect how you think about power dynamics?
  - c. What is the benefit of being aware of power dynamics?
  - d. Conversely, how might focusing too much on power dynamics be a hindrance in your everyday interactions with others?
  - e. What is one insight you had into your own understanding of power? How will you apply that insight in your professional and personal relationships?

## Related Tools:

- [Power Distance Quiz](#)