

Dealing with Power and Authority

Aims:

To establish the importance for the trainer of understanding power and its relationship to influence

To describe and analyse the main sources of trainers' power

To clarify the difference between power and authority

To devise strategies for asserting authority constructively in training events

Resources required:

Training room; flipchart, OHP and pens

- 3.1 'The main types of power' OHP transparency
- 4.1 'Understanding your Power and Authority as a Trainer' participants' instruction sheets
- 4.2 'Establishing your Authority as a Trainer' participants' instruction sheets
- 4.2 'Goldfish Bowl Discussion' participants' instruction sheets
- 'Learning log' sheets

1 Background notes



Why is power an issue for the trainer?

Although at first, it may seem an unusual subject to associate with training, 'power and authority' is central to an understanding of what happens in training events. There are five main types of power that trainers should be aware of. These are:

- Resource power
- Position power
- Expert power
- Personal power
- Negative power

Resource power comes from having control over other people's access to materials, money, training or other desired resources. People with *resource power* are, in effect, gatekeepers to those resources. If a trainer has control over who attends her training events, she holds *resource power*.

Position power arises from the role or position a person holds. The role entitles the holder to issue instructions; make decisions or direct others to carry out tasks. In most

training events, the trainer holds at least a limited amount of *position power*.

Expert power is the power that comes from being an acknowledged expert in some field. The expertise may arise from experience, knowledge, skills or a combination of these. Trainers' expertise may concern the subject of the training event, the process of training, or both.

Personal power is rather more difficult to define. It is the power associated with the personal qualities of an individual. It is sometimes called charisma, although this makes it sound rather mystical.

The four types of power described above are really *sources* of power. They differ in very significant ways. The first two, *resource power* and *position power*, are resident in the job or role. The latter two, *expert power* and *personal power*, are conferred on an individual by other people. In other words, they are earned. As a result, *expert power* and *personal power* are both more fragile but can also be more influential in bringing about change than the two formal sources of power.

But *expert power* can only be used to influence others if those people acknowledge your expertise and are prepared to grant you the authority to use your *expert power* with them. Power is only what the trainer starts with. It is what she does with that power which will determine the type of relationship she has with participants in a training event. If she uses her power in an oppressive way, she is likely to come up against expressions of *negative power*.

No discussion of power is complete without acknowledging the importance of *negative power*. Sometimes it is the only type of power an individual may possess. It is the power to block, delay, undermine, or sabotage. In some ways, this is the most important type of power for the trainer to be aware of because its use can make or break a training event.

How can trainers use their understanding of power?

Every trainer should be aware of her own sources of power and how she uses her power. This can help her to make sense of the way other people react to her, particularly if she also has formal positional power over them (for example, if she is a trainer who is also a line-manager in an organisation).

Trainers should aim to shift the power balance in favour of the participants whenever possible. But they should also know when they should appropriately *use* their power. The most important time for a trainer to acknowledge and use her power is at the beginning of a training event. At this point the participants are looking for evidence that the training event is going to be worth their while; that they are going to learn something of value and that the event is going to be stimulating. They may also be looking for some re-assurance that they will not be put 'on the spot' and that the trainer appears to know

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what she is talking about. All this places a heavy burden on the trainer who may feel anxious about the training event herself.

Sometimes participants don't want to use or even acknowledge *their* power. They may feel that the power comes with too much responsibility, particularly when they come to realise that only *they* can really control their own learning. This realisation can be very challenging to participants who have been used to more conventional teacher-pupil relationships.

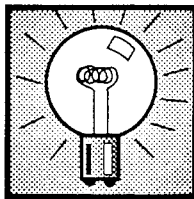
Trainers should acknowledge that even the legitimate use of power can create resistance. If the only source of power that participants have is *negative power*, then the trainer may well encounter the expression of that power through resistance to learning or sabotage of other people's learning. It is all too easy for trainers to react to this challenge or resistance by re-asserting their position power. This is an easy trap to fall into and is counterproductive since it allows participants to abdicate responsibility for their own learning.

Power is closely linked to control. The use of different training methods can reflect the trainer's need for different degrees of control over participants. It is important for the trainer to be aware of which approaches to learning she feels most comfortable with. This awareness can tell her a lot about her need to control the learning event. Shifting the balance of power towards participants involves risk for the trainer. Experiential methods such as the ones we advocate throughout this manual can involve a great deal of uncertainty and unpredictability. The trainer has less control over process and outcomes in these types of learning events and this can be very unsettling for some trainers.

Asking herself what the worst thing that could happen if she didn't have control can help reduce the anxiety which is often at the root of most power and control issues in training.

Trainers can put their knowledge of power and authority to good use in selecting methods with which they feel comfortable. It is important that they also develop their repertoire of training methods to incorporate higher risk approaches, where power and the responsibility which go with it are placed where they belong - with the participants.

2 Suggestions for using these materials



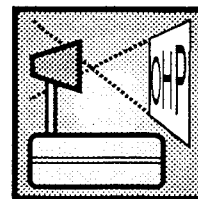
- 1 Introduce the session and its aims.
- 2 Lecturette on dealing with power and authority as a trainer using the tutor's notes (1) and OHP transparency (3.1).

- 3 Ask participants to apply these ideas to a training event they have recently organised using exercise (4.1). Distribute copies of the participants' instruction sheet.
- 4 Ask participants to discuss their responses with a partner.
- 5 In the large group, note on flipcharts the ideas which emerged from question nine in exercise 4.1.
- 6 Introduce exercise 4.2 on ranking ways of establishing authority in a training event and distribute the participants' ranking sheet.
- 7 Set up the room for the 'goldfish bowl discussion'. Identify four participants to start the discussion off and issue them with an instruction sheet. Ensure that participants keep to the rules!
- 8 Plenary to discuss the exercises. Identify any outstanding points.
- 9 Distribute 'Learning log' sheets.
- 10 Review the session against its aims. Identify and flipchart what was 'Positive, Negative and Interesting' about the session.

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3.1 OHP Transparency

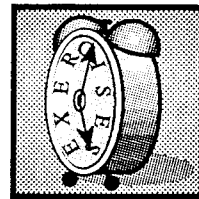
The main types of power



- Resource power
- Position power
- Expert power
- Personal power
- Negative power

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4.1 Exercise: trainer's notes

'Understanding your Power and Authority as a Trainer'**Purpose:**

To identify the sources of power used by trainers.

To develop strategies for transferring power to participants in training events.

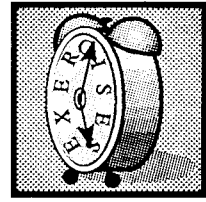
Process:

- 1 Introduce the purpose of the exercise.
- 2 Give each participant a copy of the questionnaire / instruction sheet 'Understanding your power and authority as a trainer'.
- 3 Ask participants to complete the questionnaire.
- 4 Arrange participants into pairs and ask them to discuss their responses.
- 5 Pairs return for a plenary session to discuss and flipchart the learning points and, particularly, responses to question nine.

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4.1 Exercise: participants' instruction sheet



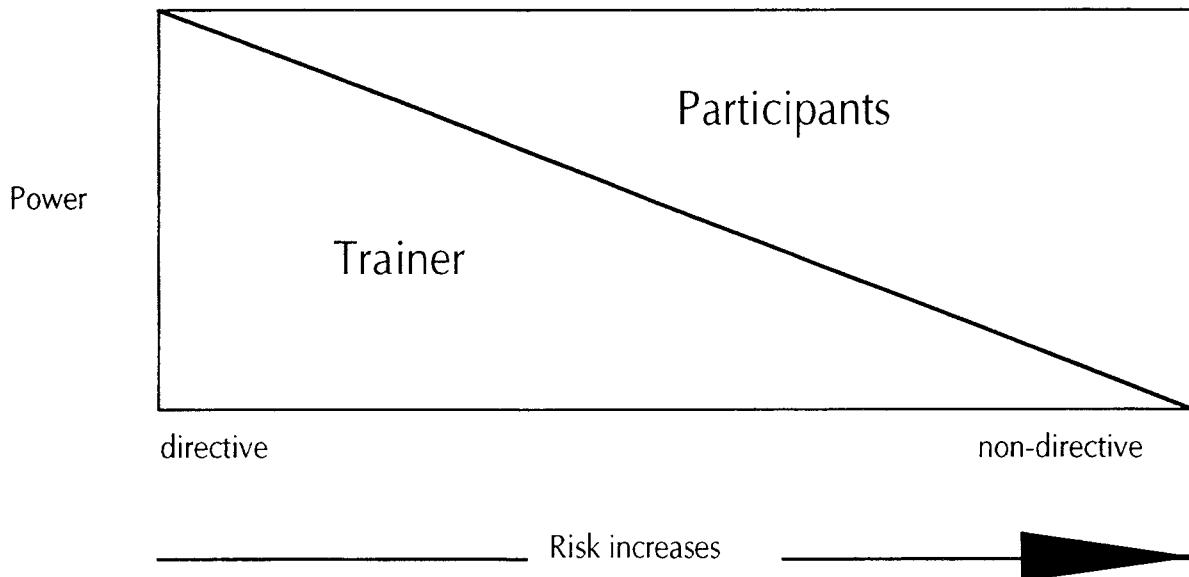
'Understanding your Power and Authority as a Trainer'

1. Think about a specific training event where you acted as a trainer.
2. Briefly describe the title or purpose of the event and who the participants were.
3. What different types of power did you bring to that training event as a trainer?
4. In what ways did these sources of power work for and against you as a trainer?
5. What steps did you take to develop authority at the beginning of the training event?
6. How did the nature of your authority change during that training event?
7. How did other people react to your authority as a trainer?
8. Look at the diagram below. Where on the spectrum do you feel most comfortable?

responsibility is
with trainer

shared responsibility

responsibility is
with participants

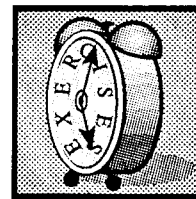


9. What could you do to shift the balance of power towards participants in future training events?

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4.2 Exercise: trainer's notes

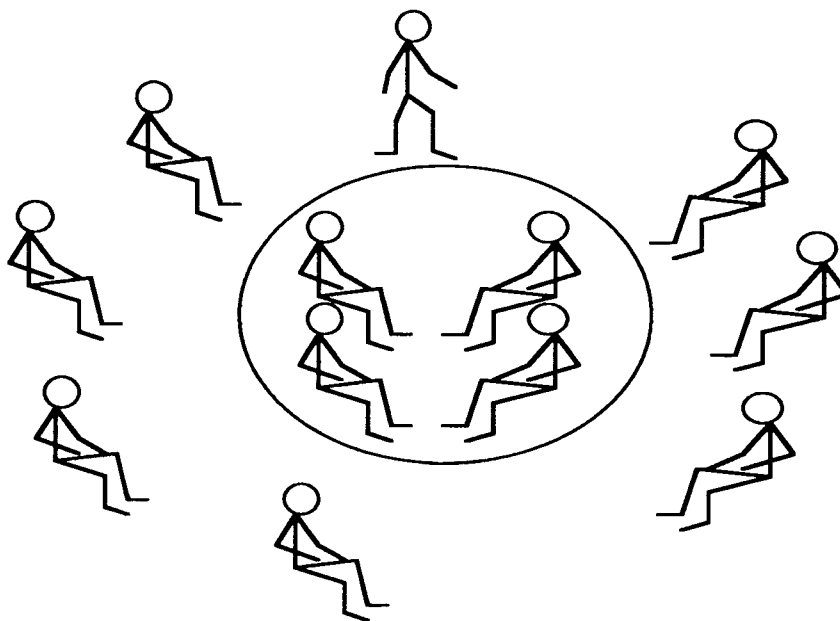
'Establishing your Authority as a Trainer'

**Purpose:**

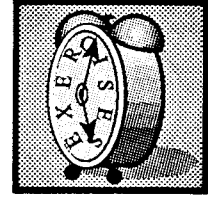
To compare and rank different strategies for trainers establishing their authority in training events.

Process:

- 1 Introduce the purpose of the exercise.
- 2 Give each participant a ranking sheet on 'Establishing your authority as a trainer'.
- 3 Ask each participant to complete the ranking exercise.
- 4 When this has been completed, give each participant a copy of the instructions for the 'Goldfish Bowl Discussion' exercise. Ask for four volunteers to start a 'goldfish bowl' discussion on 'What are the most effective ways of establishing your authority in a training event' (post the topic on a flipchart sheet where it can be easily seen by all participants). Participants should be seated as in the diagram below:



- 5 Participants should be asked to keep to the following rules:
 - Only four people are allowed in the 'goldfish bowl' at any one time.
 - Only those in the 'goldfish bowl' may speak.
 - An observer wishing to join the discussion may replace any of the people in the 'goldfish bowl' by tapping them on the shoulder and exchanging places with them.
 - Any person in the 'goldfish bowl' who is tapped on the shoulder must immediately exchange places with the person who wishes to enter the 'bowl'.
- 6 After about 15 minutes (or longer if the discussion is free-flowing and productive), stop the exercise and do a round on 'What I learned from this exercise'.

CHAPTER 8 :**4.2 Exercise: participants' ranking sheet****'Establishing your Authority as a Trainer'**

The following statements describe strategies which are used by trainers as ways of establishing their authority in training events. Rank the statements according to how likely you would be to use the strategy yourself

1 represents the strategy you would be most likely to use.

10 represents the strategy you would be least likely to use.

Statements

- a) Giving participants some brief biographical details about yourself ie establishing your credentials.
- b) Tuning in to, and joining in with the 'culture' of the group.
- c) Showing your own vulnerability.
- d) Giving an upbeat, energetic introduction to the training event.
- e) Dealing with challenges to your authority in a calm and reasoned way.
- f) Showing that you are well-prepared with exercises, handouts and resource material.
- g) Identifying which of the participants are 'opinion leaders' for the group and openly engaging their support.
- h) Using structured 'warm-up' exercises to energise the group.
- i) Explaining your role in the training event.
- j) Using the power of your own personality.

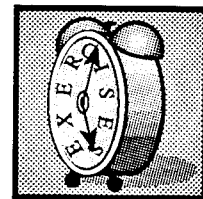
Add any other strategies you would use in the space below:

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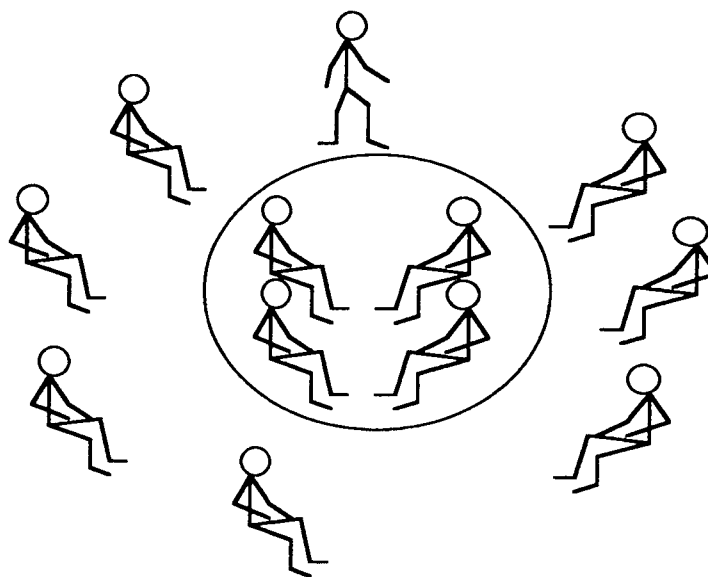
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4.2 Exercise: participants' instruction sheet

'Goldfish Bowl Discussion'



This involves four volunteers starting a discussion on 'What are the most effective ways of establishing your authority in a training event'. Participants are seated as in the diagram below, with the four volunteers in the centre:



Participants should keep to the following rules:

- i Only four people are allowed in the 'goldfish bowl' at any one time.
- ii Only those in the 'goldfish bowl' may speak.
- iii An observer wishing to join the discussion may replace any of the people in the 'goldfish bowl' by tapping them on the shoulder and exchanging places with them.
- iv Any person in the 'goldfish bowl' who is tapped on the shoulder must immediately exchange places with the person who wishes to enter the 'bowl'.