

# UNDERSTANDING POWER, RANK & PRIVILEGE

**A three-part ANZPOP mini-course for better collegial, client and personal relationships**

*More insight*

*Less drama*

*Better connections*

## MODULE 1

Defining terms – what is power, rank and privilege

Different kinds of power

Exercise – Rank Inventory



# WHAT IS POWER?

Despite the many negative associations and memories we have about power (mostly it's misuse), power in and of itself isn't good or bad. How we use it however, can be helpful or harmful.

**In very simple terms, power is about having choice and control.**

Power comes from a range of characteristics and capabilities, some **earned** through our efforts, others **unearned** – we were just born with them or given them.

Having power of any kind tends to make us feel safer and more relaxed, but not all power is equal in its ability to make us feel well.



## WHAT IS RANK?

We use the word *rank* interchangeably with *power*, but the term *rank* points to the fluid, relative and contextual nature of power. How much power we have is relative to those we are around and the context we are with them in.

In this way, our *ranking* in any given context is the sum of all the privileges we have in any given context.

Rank is multi-dimensional – there are many criteria or domains in which we can have high or low rank. It is rare to only have high or low rank in any given context; usually we have a combination of both.

## WHAT IS PRIVILEGE?

Privilege is bestowed on us through our rank/power:

- It makes our lives easier than those without our rank(s)
- It protects us from pain or oppression that those without our rank(s) are not protected from
- It gives us opportunities that those without our rank(s) cannot access.



# DIFFERENT TYPES OF POWER

There are two main types of interpersonal power, with two sub-categories in each:

**Social Power** – which can be broken down into *Physical* and *Structural*

**Personal Power** – which can be broken down into *Psychological* and *Spiritual*.

As you read through the lists to follow, think about the concept of *earned* and *unearned* rank(s). Think about how many earned rank(s) are supported by unearned ranks.

## SOCIAL POWER

Social Power is based on what is more valued in the cultural context we are in.

While Social Power is important, it is unstable because it completely relies on external hierarchies and the judgement of others.

It is also a non-transferable source of power because what is valued in one cultural context may not be valued in another.



Social Power can be divided into Physical and Structural rank attributes (note that these lists aren't exhaustive):

### **SOCIAL - STRUCTURAL**

formal education levels

socio-economic class background

current economic situation

being a member of a religion

citizenship status

membership in special or elite social clubs

level of employment within a hierarchy (i.e. receptionist versus CEO)

### **SOCIAL - PHYSICAL**

height, weight/size, age, gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, ethnicity, English as a first language, health, ability/disability.



# PERSONAL POWER

Personal Power is an internal source of power, independent of the values of the culture. It is mostly built from developing self-knowledge and growing from difficult experiences.

Personal Power is a more stable source of power because it doesn't rely on the judgement of others or external hierarchies. It is something that we internally feel.

It is also a transferable source of power, meaning that we can take it with us anywhere and feel the comforts of it irrelevant of the context we're in.



Personal Power can be divided into Psychological and Spiritual rank attributes:

### **PERSONAL - PSYCHOLOGICAL**

Self-awareness

Being at ease with conflict

Insight and capacities from having worked through or healed from a traumatic life event

Resilience (the capacity to 'bounce back' from failure and disappointments)

Feeling loved as a child and having your ideas and opinions supported and validated in childhood

Valuing your own opinions and perceptions

Being able to notice and articulate emotional states – your own and others.

### **PERSONAL – SPIRITUAL**

Feeling like you belong

Knowing your purpose in life

Having been close to death

Contact with 'the ineffable'

A deep faith and trust that life is meaningful

A relationship to something divine or transcendent.



# THE IMPORTANT 8

There are many things to know about power, but the eight most important are:

- 1 It's inherently blinding.** Having power makes life easier and more relaxing, so it's hard to notice it. Conversely, we are very aware of when we don't have much power because we don't feel so safe.
- 2 Just because we have it, doesn't mean we feel it.** It's important to become aware of power we already have and to celebrate how it makes our life easier. This makes us less likely to misuse it. Others see and feel our power, even if we don't.
- 3 It's not a tar-brush.** We can have lots of power in some areas of our life and not much in others. Our relationship with power is diverse and always evolving.
- 4 It's paradoxical.** Having a lot of power often means you have a lot of responsibility (which can make you feel not so relaxed). Sometimes having not much power gives us a lot of freedom.





**5 Power is often in the eye of the beholder.** It's subjective. We all have different ideas, opinions and projections about what characteristics we perceive as powerful and what we don't, based on our own experiences and encounters with power.

**6 Conflict comes from un-owned power.** If you want less drama and conflict in your life, owning your own power is the best place to start (Module 2 and 3 explore this more).

**7 Selling our soul for Social Power will make us unwell.** Instead, protect and nourish the whole self by developing Personal Power (alongside any Social Power ambitions that we may have).

**8 Personal Power primarily comes from working on suffering.** Turning our scars *into stars* as they say, is perhaps the most profound and enduring way to build personal power.

The most dangerous thing to believe about power is that we have none.



# MODULE 1 EXERCISE

## RANK INVENTORY

1. Think about two different group contexts or relationships in your life where you have some difficulties.
2. Using the chart on the next page, go through the list of the rank characteristics and using two different coloured pens (one for high rank and one for low rank), colour each square according to whether you think you have higher or lower rank in each area relative to the group/other person. *i.e. blue for high, black for low.*
3. Reflect on the differences in rank within each context and between contexts.
4. Could rank differences be part of the difficulties you have in those contexts? In what way?
5. Which high ranks do you have that you don't **feel** or that you tend to deny?



RANK	GROUP or	GROUP or
	RELATIONSHIP	RELATIONSHIP
	1	2
Formal education		
Socio-economic class background		
Current economic situation		
Member of a religion		
Citizenship status		
Membership in special or elite social clubs		
Place in the hierarchy		
Height		
Weight/size		
Age		
Gender		
Sexual orientation		
Skin colour		
First language		
Health		
Ability/disability		
Self-awareness		
Being at ease with conflict		
Worked through or healed from a traumatic life event		
Resilience		
Feeling loved as a child		
Valuing your own opinions and perceptions		
Being able to notice and articulate emotional states		
Feeling like you belong		
Knowing your purpose in life		
Having been close to death		
Contact with 'the ineffable'		
A deep faith and trust that life is meaningful		
A relationship to something divine or transcendent		



## COMING UP IN MODULE 2...

How to spot the less obvious signals of high and low rank (in yourself and others)

AND

Why *rank unconsciousness* is the number one cause of interpersonal conflict with examples.

