

# WORKING WITH POWER AND CONTROL ISSUES IN THE GROUP

## Two Critical Issues

- Issues associated with other members
- Issues associated with the leader

### 1: Issues Associated with Other Members

- How much influence do I have in this group?
- Are others better than me?
- Who is the top dog in the group?
- How do others view me?

## Three Types of Leader Activity

1. **Highlighting power and control issues** in the group. When dynamics are observed, identify them for exploration.
2. **Preempting power and control issues.** Try to side-step issues and take early action to avoid them.
3. **Mitigating power and control issues.** When issues arise, one must respond.

### **Leader Activities for Highlighting Power/Control Issues**

1. Reflecting on inter-member power dynamics using process comments and reflective statements.
2. Naming the beast. When issues seem to be embedded in statements (e.g., veiled put-downs, make sure they are identified as such.
3. Normalizing power issues. Let members know that finding one's place in the group and feeling competitive is a normal aspect of groups.

### **Leader Activities for Pre-empting Power/Control Issues**

1. Develop multiple hierarchies. Using activities and reinforcing statements, make it possible for there to be multiple sources of influence, power and status in the group.
2. Develop opportunities for indigenous leadership. Set up opportunities for group members to be leaders or to use their expertise.
3. Rotating leadership roles. Implement roles and rituals that can provide rotating leadership among the members.
4. Devaluing destructive roles. When members engage in destructive roles, make respond in a way (either individually or using members) that will devalue the role in the group.
5. Valuing contributions. When members make contributions to the group or adopt helpful roles, reflect on their contribution.
6. Normalizing differences. When differences emerge in the group, model an accepting attitude and reflect on how differences and conflict are normal rather than a threat.

### **Leader Activities for Mitigating Power/Control Issues**

1. Ensuring safety. Intervene immediately if a group member's behavior appears threatening to other members. The group must be safe.
2. Holding group responsible for their rules. Allow the group to set their own rules and then make it their issue when rules are broken. Concurrently, make sure scapegoating and attacking don't occur as they deal with infractions. Promote helping each other even when there is a need for confrontation.
3. Structuring activities to resolve issues. When issues emerge, structure activities that address the core dynamics to highlight and begin a resolution process.
4. Mediating conflict. When two members are in conflict, engage others to break deadlocks and mediate problem solving processes.
5. Clarifying issues. Continue to clarify issues as they arise so the group can more consciously attend to the issues.

6. Acknowledge hierarchies. Use activities and comments to validate (or challenge) the structures of power in the group.

## **2: Issues Associated with the Leader?**

- Does the leader really respect me?
- Is the leader going to control me?
- What is the extent of our power?
- Can we really have a say in what we do?

### **Three Types of Leader Activity**

1. **Empower the group.** Promote mutual aid and group decision making to ensure that all have influence in the group.
2. **Negotiate roles and boundaries.** As issues arise and people want a response, negotiate the limits and activities that one will perform on behalf of the group. Don't just offer, ask the group if they want you to do things.
3. **Disempower problem dynamics.** Make sure that problems are identified and worked through rather than allowing them to fester.

#### **Leader Activities for Empowering the Group**

1. Promote opportunities for decision making and mutual aid. Rather than responding, throw things back and defer to the group.
2. Allow the group to make mistakes. Even when decisions are not necessarily the ideal direction, allow the group to make their decisions and learn from them.
3. Identify potential problems with group direction. If the group may run into trouble, identify challenges for them to solve.
4. Coach the group in planning direction. As the group makes decisions, help them to plan how they will implement the decisions.
5. Allowing worker directed challenges but holding accountable. Know that the group will challenge worker authority and possible even defy the worker. Allow the challenges but still hold them accountable for outcomes.

#### **Leader Activities for Negotiating Roles and Boundaries**

1. Identify and ratify domains of expertise. Use reflective statements to identify member strengths as they emerge in the group. Then defer to expertise and allow the members to acknowledge contributions.
2. Identify roles needed by the group. As needs arise (either about activities or member needs) identify what is needed and allow the group to respond.
3. Keeping the group purpose and goals central. As power and control issues emerge in the group, continue to reinforce the purpose and goals of the group.
4. Negotiate your role in the group by ask the group when assuming a role or taking on a task. Make sure they understand that your role is being negotiated through what they allow you to do.
5. Creating roles that promote group outcomes. If members are at risk of taking on disruptive roles, create needs and encourage them to adopt a helpful role in the group.

#### **Leader Activities for Disempowering Problematic Dynamics**

1. Empowering non-polarized members. In polarized situations, engage the peripheral members to break the deadlocks.
2. Empowering pro-work members. Acknowledge and support the direction proposed by positive and helpful members. Again be careful of scapegoating and prevent that by sharing the attention.
3. Making role contexts focal. When people adopt roles that they use outside of the group, acknowledge the context for the role and encourage using new roles in the group.
4. Changing membership. In extreme situations (e.g., when one member may be harmed by group membership), change the membership by restructuring the group or bringing in some new members who can withstand the dynamics.
5. Allow consequences to occur. When members are deadlocked and it has a natural consequence, allow the natural consequences to occur.