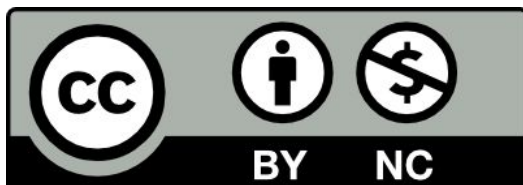# UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO | IRIS
Improving Rural Interpreter Skills

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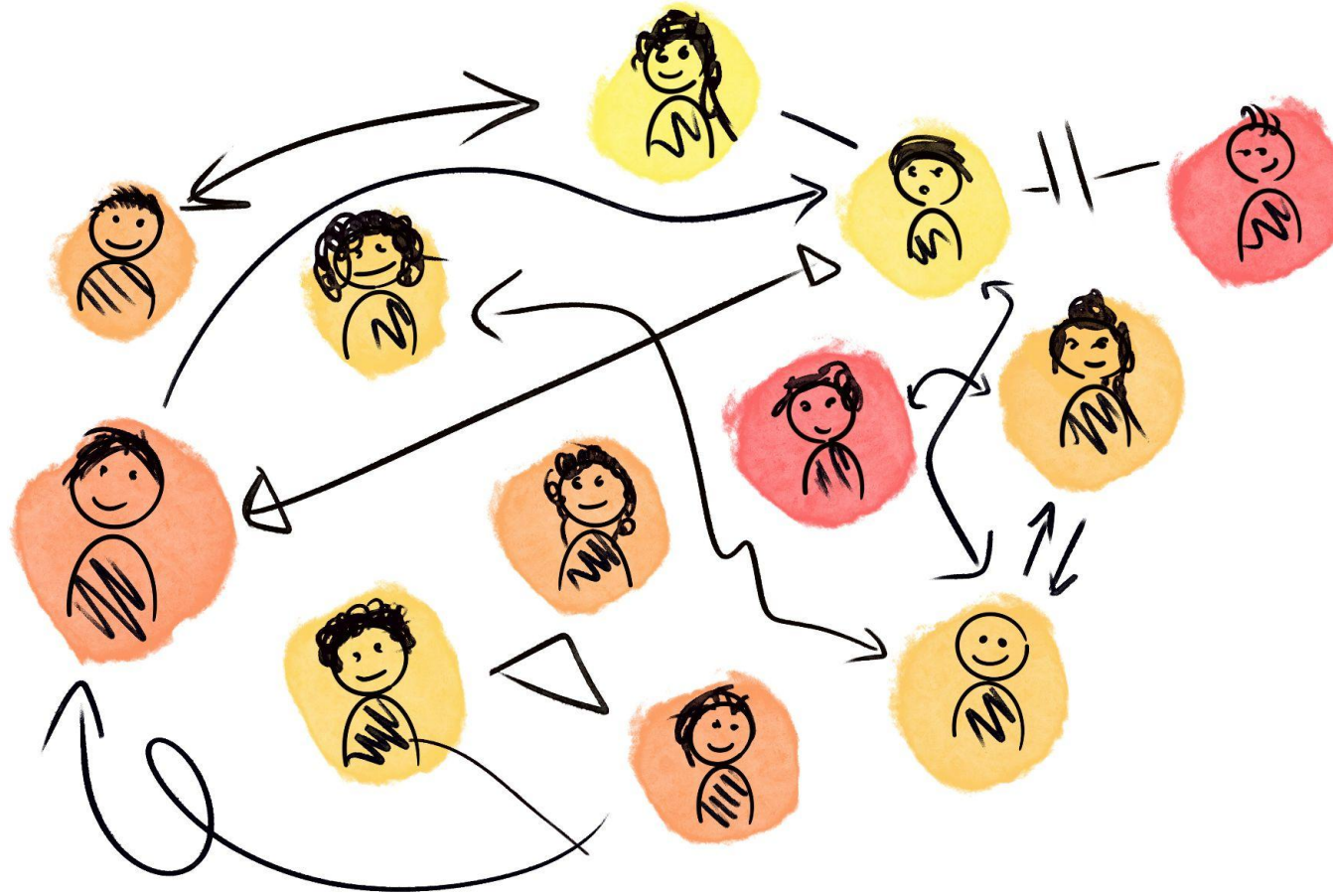
Module 2: Power Dynamics

Module content developed by Daniel Gough
ASL lectures by: Jeremy Quiroga

Overview

Overview: This module will explore the power dynamics encountered by facilitators and mentors in the IRIS Project. Participants will gain an understanding of what power dynamics are and how they impact communities of learning. Furthermore, participants will receive the resources needed to examine power dynamics in practical application.

Objectives

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Learning Outcomes and Objectives

Upon Completion of this module participants will be able to:

1. Define power dynamics within a team context.

2. Identify various sources and forms of power that can exist within a team.

3. Recognize the factors inherent in power relationships beyond just formal leadership roles.

4. Understand the impact of unconscious biases on perceptions of power within a team.

5. Understand how to gain support from team members, including those with different power positions.

6. Develop the ability to observe and assess power dynamics within a team.

7. Develop strategies to mitigate biases and promote fairness and equity within a team.

8. Reflect on personal biases and their potential influence on power perceptions.

9. Explore how power dynamics can influence team dynamics, communication, and decision-making.

10. Apply the knowledge gained by developing an action plan for addressing specific power dynamics to the role of a facilitator or mentor.

Introduction to Power Dynamics, Part I

Brené Brown (2006), explains that shame is a universal emotion that we all try to avoid, and in the workplace shame manifests as favoritism, gossiping, harassment, perfectionism, and cover-ups, to name a few. The opposite of shame, Brown says, is empathy – connecting to the emotions that underpin someone's experience. What stands out here, is that the examples that Brown notes for ways in which shame manifests in the workplace have an underlying theme of power in play.

Introduction to Power Dynamics, Part II

Power dynamics are inevitable in relationships both inside and outside of the room. But they play a particularly important role anywhere and are especially crucial when we bring into consideration the obvious power dynamics between a facilitator/mentor and participant.

Gough, 2022, studied professional ASL interpreter participants and described them as vulnerable and reluctant to complain about problems because they fear the loss or failure of their placement, do not want to jeopardize or embarrass, or fear alienating an employer who may provide future references. Additionally, power dynamics impact how you communicate, can streamline or sidetrack collaboration, can silence certain voices, and consequently lead to alienation and impacts on one's mental health.

Impact?

Power Dynamics: Are they impacting your team?

1. Power dynamics are present in every team, and it is important that facilitators and mentors are aware of them. A common misconception is that the leader always has the most power within a team.

2. Power dynamics can have a dramatic effect on the functioning of a team.

3. Team power dynamics can have an impact on your ability to:

   a. **Make change** within your team, and have your people support it

   b. **Hold people accountable** for their performance; and

   c. **Lead effectively**, to have people want to follow you.

THOUGHTFUL LEADER

Power Dynamics: Are They Impacting Your Team?

www.thoughtfulleader.com

Legitimate Power

What is legitimate power?

Legitimate power is the type of power you get when you occupy a position of authority (Kipnis, 2014). As a facilitator or mentor, you probably have at least some of this type of power from the role you play (French & Raven, 2015).

In your leadership role, you likely have the ability to **set goals** (Yukl, 2019)**, decide who to start** (Northouse, 2018), **set performance targets** (Mintzberg, 2017), and **hold people accountable** to them (Bass & Riggio, 2020). These all come from your legitimate power. The degree of legitimate power you have will depend on your role and the different responsibilities you hold (Lunenburg, 2012).

Your COL participants will generally have less of this type of power than you do (Pfeffer, 2010). Legitimate power often gives you the ability to provide or withhold rewards in your COL, too (Bass & Bass, 2010).
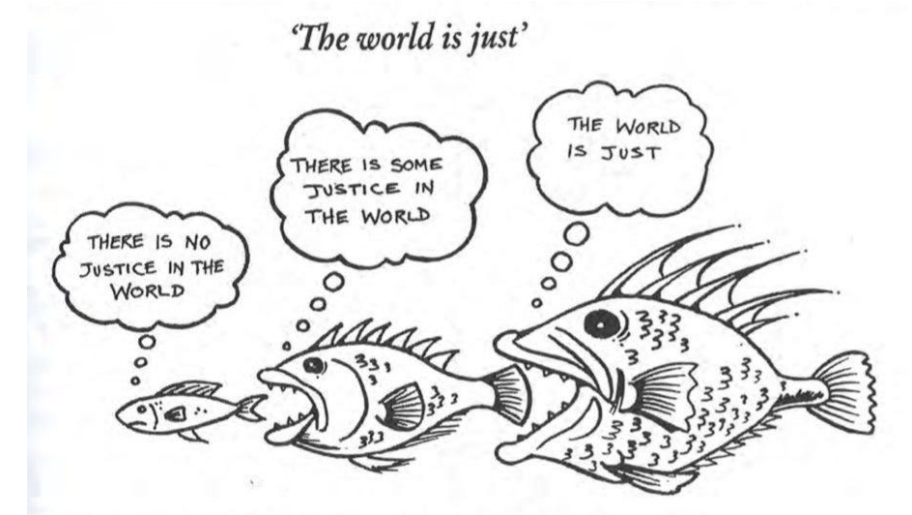

'The world is just'

THERE IS NO JUSTICE IN THE WORLD

THERE IS SOME JUSTICE IN THE WORLD

THE WORLD IS JUST

Image: (Pai, 2019)

Expert Power

What is expert power?

Expert power is very common within teams and communities (Badura, Galvin, & Lee, 2022). It comes from somebody being an "expert" in **what they do**, or **what they know** (Wang & Noe, 2010). This doesn't necessarily mean they need to have a PhD or be some sort of genius. It simply means that they know how to do something better than other people can.

There is a certain time when expert power is at its strongest is when someone knows how to do something that nobody else in your team or community can do (Yukl, 2010). For instance, when a person was working in the interpreting field, that person would often come across people who understood parts of interpreting techniques or decision making skills that nobody else knew anything about. This meant that these people had strong expert power, because they were the only source of expertise within that particular area (Wang & Noe, 2010).

It's not all about interpreting though. It can be about having specific skills and knowledge in any domain. Expert power can create a power dynamic where a facilitator or mentor feels compelled to do what the expert wants, for fear of them leaving or becoming unhappy (Yukl, 2010).
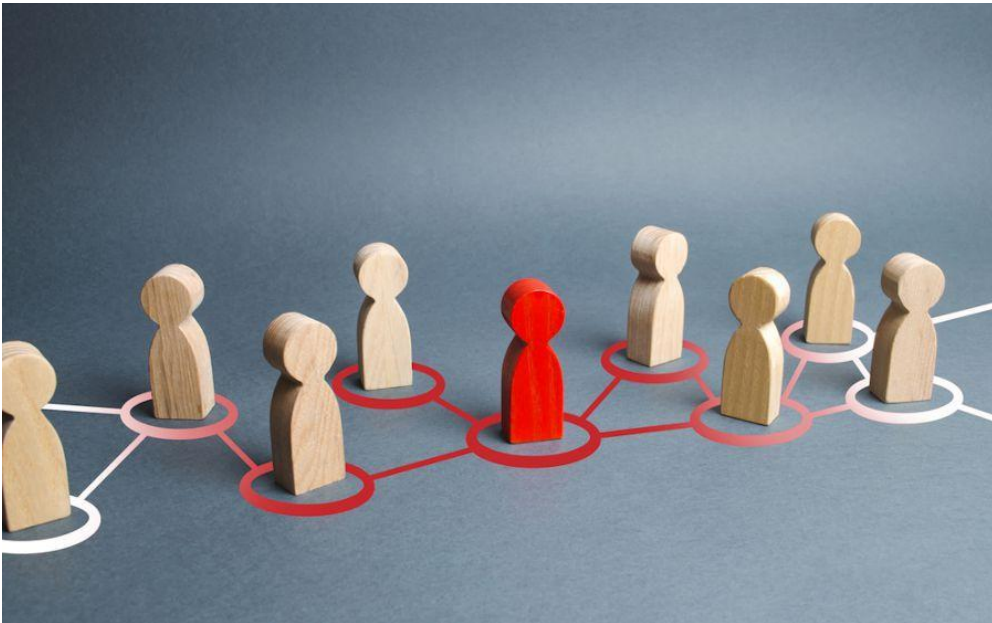
Referent Power

What is referent power?

Referent power, arguably the most captivating power form, is an **individual's ability to influence based on personal attributes, charisma, or reputation** (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2015). Facilitators or mentors with strong referent power possess significant influence and extensive networks (Yukl, 2013). This enables them to shape decisions and actions, even without direct authority (Ferris et al., 2019).

In intricate programs, people build relationships beyond their teams (Johnson & Johnson, 2019). COL members may form strong ties with higher-ups (Sparrowe et al., 2001). Referent power dynamics can affect these relationships, attracting support and cooperation.

However, it's vital to recognize that while referent power fosters collaboration, it can challenge official roles (French & Raven, 1959), leading to complex power dynamics (Dinh et al., 2014).

Canvas Discussion: Analyzing Types of Power, Part I

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NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Review the following scenarios and determine the types of power described (legitimate, expert, or referent):

1. Imagine you are a facilitator. In this scenario, you possess ____?____ power due to your experience and the formal role assigned to you as a facilitator. Your COL recognizes your expertise and respects your guidance in various interpreting scenarios.

2. One of the interpreters in the group, Maria, holds ____?____ power. She specializes in medical interpretation and has extensive knowledge of medical terminology and procedures. Her colleagues often seek her insights and advice when dealing with medical interpreting assignments, valuing her expertise highly.

3. Another interpreter, Alex, wields ____?____ power. He is known for his excellent communication skills and the ability to connect with clients and colleagues on a personal level. Alex's interpersonal skills have helped in building strong relationships both within the interpreting team and with clients, making him an influential figure in the group.

Canvas Discussion: Analyzing Types of Power, Part II

Original post directions:

Compose an original post in which you share the power dynamics you have identified for the three scenarios. Please elaborate on how different forms of power can be utilized in the context of COL dynamics.

Please note that you won't be able to see other participants' posts until after you create your own.

Response post directions:

Respond to the post of one of your colleagues by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.

How to Improve Power Dynamics?

Now that we have an overview of the different types of power that might be at play in your COL, let's take a look at what we can do about them.

The idea here is not to try to remove all sources of power from your COL members. Instead, it is to mitigate them, so they don't stop you from doing what you need to do as a facilitator or mentor.

Nothing makes a facilitator or mentor feel more helpless than being unable to take action because of a huge power imbalance within their team.
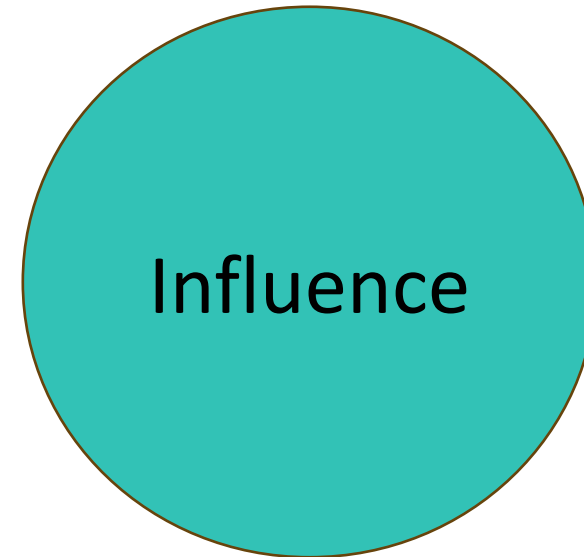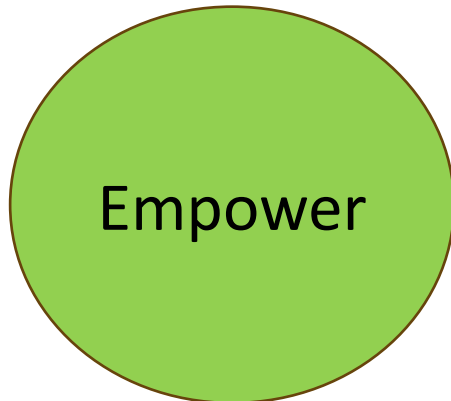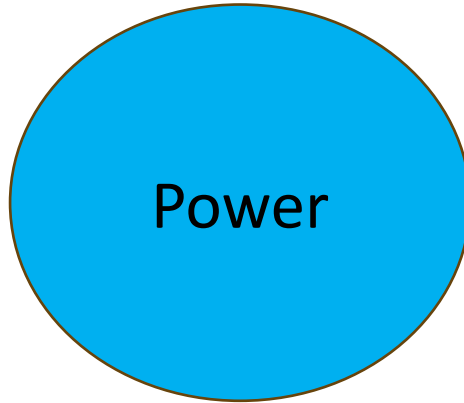
Addressing Expert Power Imbalance

Some simple ways to deal with an imbalance caused by expert power include:

1. **Cross-skilling:** Cross-skilling means training up other people in your team, to remove a "single point of failure". The more other people understand how to do what the "expert" can do, the less power the expert has.

2. **Dual roles:** Sometimes it makes sense to have multiple people playing a similar role, rather than just one. This means you have a backup option available, potentially reducing the expert power dynamic at play.

3. **Taking it outside:** External consultants or contractors can also act as backups to your in-house experts. However, this only works when they know your environment, so think about potentially letting them take on projects to become familiar with how you work.

Note that when you try to tackle an expert power problem, you may ruffle some feathers. Your expert may sense that they'll lose power, meaning that they may resist the changes you're making.

Addressing Referent Power Imbalance

To deal with a power imbalance caused by referent power, you can try the following:

1. **Building relevant relationships:** If you can build a relationship where you can influence a key stakeholder, then the referent power of others will be reduced. A strong network helps you to remain connected and can defuse strong referent power relationships.

2. **Focus on the WIFM:** If you're struggling to take action in your team because of a referent power imbalance, be clear on the "***What's in it for me?***" for the people you need to influence. If you can convince your key stakeholders that your action has real implications, you'll have a better chance of diluting this referent power.

Personal relationships can be one of the trickiest causes of power imbalances within a team. Building a strong network and understanding what your key stakeholders need are perhaps the best tools to improve the situation.

Understanding Power Dynamics, Cross Cultural Communication, Biases and Assumptions

Going Further . . .

Power dynamics are inevitable in relationships, they play a particularly important role at work, and are especially crucial when we bring into consideration the obvious power dynamics between a facilitator or mentor and COL member(s). The same goes for communicating across differences and being aware of our unconscious biases and assumptions as we increasingly work with diverse individuals.

Keep in mind: these are not binary. In other words, a particular culture is not either one, each spectrum represents a wide range along which individuals and cultures may fall. Both individual and cultural orientations to these spectrums can also shift and move over time. It is useful to reflect on our own orientations to these spectrums, because it can provide insights into potential misunderstandings or conflicts that could arise with people who orient differently to the spectrums than we do. That recognition is the first step towards developing strategies for engaging respectfully across these differences.

![Improving Rural Interpreter Skills — University of Northern Colorado logo]

Influences on Intercultural Communication & Unconscious Bias

Review these two videos about influences on intercultural communication and unconscious bias to inform our approaches when working with rural interpreters as a facilitator or mentor.

Exercising Influence

Building Partnerships

Compromises

Effective Qualities

Professional

1. Results focused
2. Does what needs to be done no matter how difficult
3. Sets standards for long term endurance
4. Build strong successors
5. Works with those better than themselves

Humility

1. Personal modesty
2. Looks in the mirror for mistakes
3. Ambition for community or cause
4. Spends own time and resources to build allies
5. Looks out of the window to give credit

Four Steps of Self Analysis
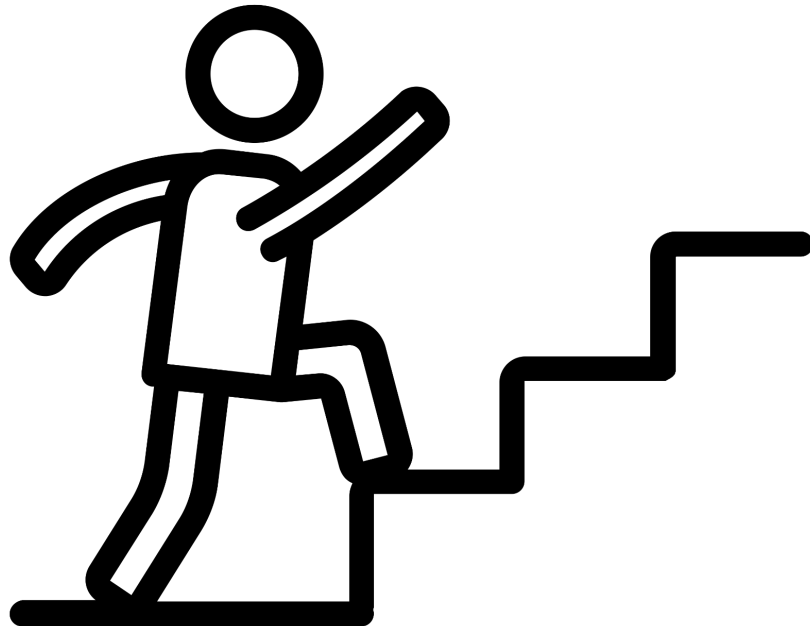
1. **Do not assume**
   a. Question conventional wisdom
2. **Try new things/ways**
   a. Be creative, innovate, and involve others
3. **Be solution focused**
   a. Lamenting a problem will not solve it
4. **Embrace change**
   a. Be open to new ways, methods, and ideas

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Trust & Power

How does trust factor into power dynamics?

Trust is useful because it **reduces the chances that people will exercise their power against you, and reduces the resistance to your legitimate power.**

For example, if your people trust you, they are less likely to talk to their best friend who happens to be the director (referent power) to stop what you're trying to do.

Your resident expert is less likely to hold you to ransom if they believe you have their best interests at heart.

And your people are much more likely to follow your lead and do what you say if they trust you. This means that the legitimate power from your role is at its strongest.

Trust is a fantastic way to help sway the power balance in your favor, so make it a priority to build it!

GoReact Discussion: Self-Analysis and Reflection Activity: Exploring Professionalism and Humility, Part I

In this activity, delve into your personal qualities related to "Professionalism" and "Humility." Reflect on where you stand in terms of these qualities and how they influence your interactions with others, especially in professional settings. Consider your tendencies towards achieving results versus your inclination towards personal modesty and contributing to community causes. Also, think about any changes or developments in these qualities over time.

Part 1: Self-Reflection

1. **Professionalism:** Explore your approach to professionalism. Are you more results-driven, or do you prioritize ethical behavior and respect in your professional life? Reflect on specific instances where your professionalism has played a significant role in your interactions.

2. **Humility:** Analyze your humility as a personal trait. Do you tend to downplay your achievements and focus on collaboration, or do you have a more assertive and self-promoting demeanor? Think about how your humility (or lack thereof) affects your relationships with colleagues and peers.

3. **Changes Over Time:** Consider how your understanding and practice of professionalism and humility have evolved throughout your personal and professional journey. Have you noticed any shifts in your values or behaviors in these areas?

GoReact Discussion: Self-Analysis and Reflection Activity: Exploring Professionalism and Humility, Part II

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Part 2: Sharing your experiences about trust.

Original post directions:

Create a GoReact reflective response that addresses the following three ideas:

1. **Trust in Professional Relationships:** Explore the role of trust in power dynamics within your professional relationships. Reflect on how trust can strengthen or weaken these dynamics. Share experiences or scenarios where trust played a critical role in your interactions with colleagues or superiors.

2. **Cultural and Individual Trust:** Examine trust from both an individual and cultural perspective. How does trust differ among individuals and within various cultural contexts? Consider how these variations impact your interactions and decision-making in your professional life.

3. **Trust and Legitimate Power:** Reflect on how trust influences the exercise of legitimate power in professional settings. How can trust enhance the effectiveness of leadership, and conversely, how can a lack of trust hinder it? Share any insights or personal experiences related to this topic.

GoReact Discussion: Self-Analysis and Reflection Activity: Exploring Professionalism and Humility, Part III

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

Response post directions:

When reviewing your colleague's posts consider the importance of recognizing and respecting diverse orientations. Respond to the post of one of your colleagues by asking clarifying questions or seeking additional information that allows you the space to understand them better.

Synchronous Session: Unpacking Together

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This module **requires your attendance** at a synchronous session. Your facilitator(s) will share the exact details of the date and time of this session.

During this session come prepared to share your reflections about this module and ways to further develop your professionalism, humility, and trust-building skills.

This collaborative reflection activity will provide valuable insights into your qualities and how they impact your professional life, helping you become more self-aware and effective in your interactions with others.

Application to Synchronous Sessions

Power Dynamics Scaling Score

This module has given you the tools to look deeper at your relationship with power dynamics in alignment with your role as an emerging facilitator and mentor. After you facilitate your chosen synchronous session(s) and complete your mentoring session in module 8, consider utilizing the Power Dynamics Scaling Score (PDSS) (Cook et al., 2018).

The PDSS is as a metric where you receive collegial feedback on the power dynamics exhibited in your synchronous session. This metric allows for a better understanding of how facilitator/mentor behaviors influence the overall dynamics of the session.

You can use this tool in a number of ways:

1. Anonymous submissions: Zoom poll, Google survey as an exit poll, etc…
2. Identifiable responses: Utilize the last few minutes of the session to discuss the PDSS openly as a group

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas see the downloadable PDSS.

Post-Test

NOTE: You have to log into Canvas to complete this post-test

1. What does "power dynamics" mean within a team context?
   a. The team's physical strength and agility.
   b. The team's ability to dominate others.
   c. The way power is distributed and exercised within a team.
   d. The team's access to resources.
   e. The team's communication skills.

2. How do power dynamics go beyond formal leadership roles?
   a. Power dynamics are solely determined by formal leadership roles.
   b. Power dynamics are irrelevant in team contexts.
   c. Power dynamics can involve individuals with little formal authority.
   d. Power dynamics are always transparent.
   e. Power dynamics are static and unchanging.

3. What is a key strategy for navigating and influencing power dynamics when implementing changes within a team?
   a. Ignoring power dynamics entirely.
   b. Maintaining secrecy about changes.
   c. Gaining support from team members, especially those with different power positions.
   d. Avoiding changes to minimize power struggles.
   e. Promoting competition among team members.

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4. Why is addressing biases crucial for a team's success?

a. Biases always lead to positive outcomes.
b. Biases do not impact team dynamics.
c. Biases can hinder fairness and equity within a team.
d. Biases are irrelevant in a team context.
e. Biases are inherent in all teams and cannot be changed.

5. How can you apply the knowledge gained in this module to a real-world scenario in your role as a facilitator or mentor?

a. By ignoring power dynamics in favor of other considerations.
b. By applying a one-size-fits-all approach to all scenarios.
c. By developing action plans that do not consider power dynamics.
d. By tailoring strategies to address specific power dynamics challenges in your team.
e. By avoiding any involvement in team issues.

6. What is the purpose of developing an action plan for addressing power dynamics challenges within your team?

a. To reinforce existing power imbalances.
b. To ignore power dynamics and focus on other aspects.
c. To create more power struggles within the team.
d. To have a structured approach to address and improve team dynamics.
e. To ensure that all team members have equal power.

Correct responses: 1: C., 2. C, 3. C., 4. C, 5. D, 6. D

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