

## **Knowledge-power, rank and privilege.**

A key part of the management role involves coaching, mentoring and supervision of people in the team. However, no human interaction is power neutral for very long, so it is important that we consider issues of power, influence and how these usually effect communication between ourselves and others.

Arnold Mindell in his book, "The Leader as a Martial Artist" developed an analysis that asks us to consider social, psychological and spiritual rank as being of importance in understanding the power relationships that exist.

### **Social Rank**

Social rank refers to the position that we have in a particular situation because of the entrenched patterns of social relationships that privilege some people over others. Flood in his book *Beyond the Fifth Discipline* talks about the following social aspects - race, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ability, expertness and hierarchy. The list is probably broader than this: for example the school you went to, the educational qualifications that you might have, the part of the world you come from, the part of town you live in, the amount of disposable income you might have, whether or not you live with a partner, your gender and ethnicity. All these contribute to social rank.

### **Psychological Rank**

You may have less or more psychological rank depending on a number of factors. Do you usually wake up looking forward to the day, have you suffered abuse in the past, are you in a relationship that causes you a lot of stress, do you have people in your life you can rely on, no matter what? Have you a sense of your own abilities and strengths. Can you see the gifts and positive qualities that you have? All these contribute to the psychological rank you may have.

### **Spiritual Rank**

Have you worked a lot on who you are? Do you feel you have sense of mission, a strong sense of faith or spiritual access.

These three descriptions of rank can help us understand the complex nature of power in one- one relationships. For example one person may have a higher social rank than another because of the authority vested in them because of their hierarchical position in an organisation. The other person may have more social rank in gender, class, and educational qualifications or in psychological or spiritual rank, this complicates the power dynamic. It may be that the person with less status in the organisation has more rank and power in the relationship.

## **Some ways in which rank and privilege affect relationships.**

### When you have higher rank.

People with high rank in any area may be unaware of it and its privilege. For example an older man in a junior position may be unaware of the aspects of higher rank operating when he is supervised by a younger woman. When you have high rank of which you are unaware you may have a tendency to blame the other person(s) for things not working, going wrong or for them not understanding. Or, you may feel exasperated with the other person.

The person who has higher rank may be able to be late for meetings without noticing its effect on others. When you have high rank you can usually influence the time, location and setting of meetings, the subject matter (what is not spoken about as well as what is).

Higher rank may mean you feel safer and more powerful with the other side sometimes regardless of your job status.

When someone else has higher rank.

You may feel more anxious and uncertain, be less clear, and even stammer.

Your tendency may be to take blame, you may have to wait, have less of a say, and be interrupted more. You may be more likely to feel unsafe, threatened or confused.

Try this exercise in threes allowing 15 to 20 minutes for each person to work through these questions.

1. Write down your social privileges and share them with your partners now. How do they affect you in day to day life about town, shopping, travelling, socialising with other people, how do they affect you at home or at work?
2. Write down your psychological and spiritual privileges. How do they affect you in day to day life at home and at work?
3. Recognise how these may allow you to act in certain ways in certain situations - think about situations you have been in when you have higher rank – what rank and privileges did you have what about the other person?
4. Think of situations where you have had lower rank and privilege – what were these. What about the other person?
5. Consider how you could alter the situations where you have higher rank.
6. Consider strategies that you could use to alter situation where you have lower rank.
7. How could you use the rank that you have more usefully?