Chapter 14

Power Mapping
Charting Strategic Relationships

Power Mapping
A framework for problem solving through relationship building.

People interested and involved in promoting positive social change— through service, advocacy and other vehicles—need to think about context and relationships within the spheres they work. Social change agents need tools to access resources and to put their ideas into action. Power mapping gives participants a theoretical framework and a set of tools to tap the power needed to make things happen. Power mapping is particularly helpful in coalition building (with whom should we develop a relationship) and in citizen lobbying (who can we use to influence this legislator).

The Goal is to visually map out relationships between people, organizations, and institutions in a given context in order to understand the value of these relationships.

Warm-up: 6 Degrees of separation: Kevin Bacon.

This game assumes that every person in the world (or at least in Hollywood) is connected to every other person by no more than six 'degrees of separation.' One person, who knows another person, who knows another person, who, eventually leads you to your target – in this case, Kevin Bacon.
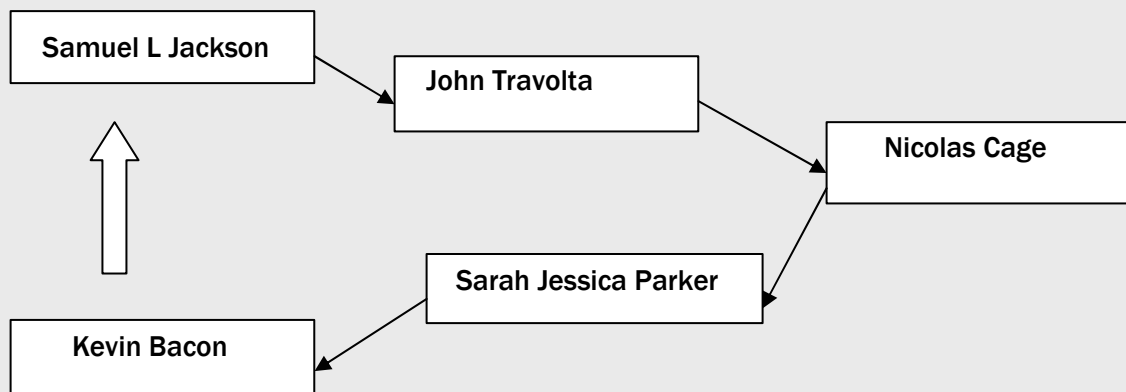
Here's an example: How is Samuel L. Jackson connected to Kevin Bacon?

Samuel L. Jackson was in *Pulp Fiction* with John Travolta.
John Travolta was in *Face Off* with Nicolas Cage.
Nicolas Cage was in *Honeymoon in Vegas* with Sarah Jessica Parker.
Sarah Jessica Parker was in *Footloose* with Kevin Bacon.

Samuel L. Jackson connects to Kevin Bacon in through four people, or 'degrees.'

Try another one with Kevin Bacon or any other actor. You may see that different groups manage to find different pathways to the target.

Why is this important?

A power map reveals avenues of influence available to an organization. The method allows a group to see how a particular target is influenced and to see connections between these influences. For example, you might want your state legislature to sponsor a bill. Understanding the relationships your state legislature has within his district can help you make your case. Your group might discover that one of the district's largest political donors has a stake in the issue your bill pertains to. You might even discover that your group is connected to that legislator through another organization with whom you work. You can leverage that donor (by lobbying) or that organization (through the relationship you already have) to help you make the case to your target.

How-to: A step-by-step

1) Determine your target
2) Map influence of the target
3) Determine relational power lines
4) Target priority relationships
5) Make a plan

Step 1: Determine your target

A power map is a visual tool; it should be drawn. The map starts with a person or institution you want to influence – this is your target. Power maps are often worked out for the purpose of solving a problem. The person or institution who can solve this problem is usually the target for the map. Often the targets are decision makers.

Example: Wal-Mart is trying to build a giant new building in your community.

The AnyCity Zoning Commission is considering a special rewrite of the town's ordinances to accommodate the giant new Wal-Mart. DFA-AnyCity group opposes efforts to rewrite local laws to accommodate Wal-Mart. The AnyCity Zoning Commission has the final say over any changes to the ordinance. Two members are opposed, two members are in favor. One member of the Commission, Joe Smith, is undecided. DFA-AnyCity has decided to influence Joe Smith to ensure he votes the right way. The group is developing a strategy to influence Commissioner Smith.
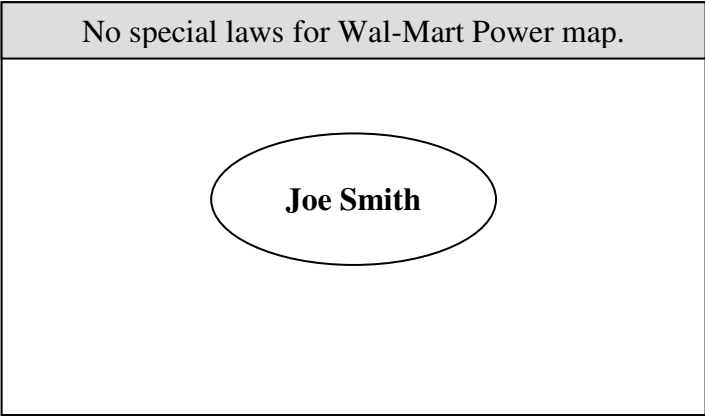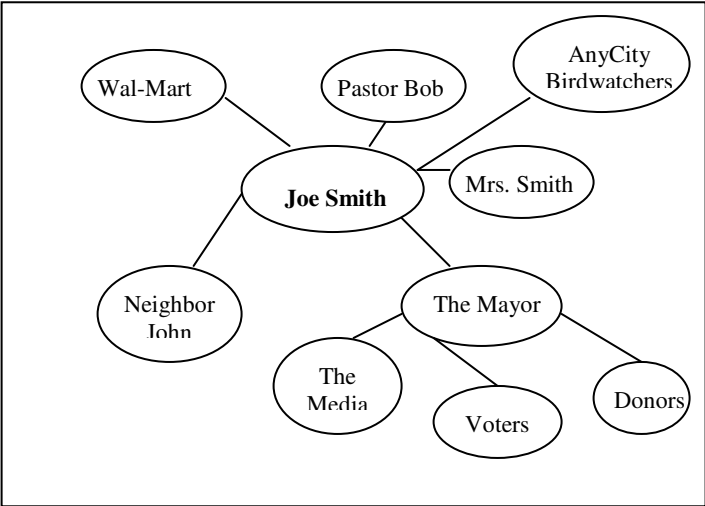
DFA-AnyCity's power map target is Joe Smith.

No special laws for Wal-Mart Power map.

Joe Smith

Step 2: Map influence of target(s)

Think of all the associations who have a relationship with this target. Think broadly. These can include work, political, family, religious, and neighborhood ties. Anyone who can exert influence on this individual is mapped.

Be creative. Even if you decide you do not want to target, for example, the Commissioners family, putting them up on the map might give you ideas on other avenues of influence.

Be strategic. Elected officials are easy to map. Look at all the major donors and constituency groups. Do some research.

Wal-Mart · Pastor Bob · AnyCity Birdwatchers · Joe Smith · Mrs. Smith · Neighbor John · The Mayor · The Media · Voters · Donors

Be Thorough. Spend some time thinking about Joe Smith from every different angle. Once you are satisfied, start thinking about what *these* people and institutions are connected to. A good power map will have major influences mapped out, outlining multiple degrees of separation.

Step 3: Determine Relational Power Lines

Take a step back and review the network you've created. Some of these people and institutions not only connect to Joe Smith, but also to each other. You might find that Joe Smith is a member of the local bird watching group, but so are the mayor, Joe's wife, and his pastor. The bird watching group connects many of the influences in Joe's life. These connectors are called "nodes of power" within a given network.

These nodes don't always connect directly to the target. If Joe was not a member of bird watching group, but his wife, pastor, and mayor were members, the bird watching group would still be a major influence on Joe. Power mapping sometimes reveals surprises (who knew that a bird watching group could be so politically strategic?).

Also, some of these networks may connect directly to you or your group. Maybe Joe Smith's next door neighbor is in your car pool.

Step 4: Target Priority Relationships

Now analyze some of the connections and make some decisions. One way to do this is to circle the few people that have the most relational power lines drawn to them (the bird watching group and the mayor). Consider attempting to involve these people through your group's current relationships. If no one in the group has any influence over these nodes of power, it may be useful to do a power map around that institution or person to help you figure out how you can influence them. Your power map will begin to resemble a web. Don't worry if it gets a little messy.

Another consideration might be a person or institution in the map that doesn't necessarily have many different relational lines running to him/her/it, but nonetheless has a few critical ones and seems very influential. If you can identify a priority person/institution for which there isn't a clear relationship, then you might want to encourage the group to may be to go and find out more about this person/institution.

As you get used to power mapping, you can draw more complex maps. Many problems will have multiple decision-makers, for example. You may start to draw the target's most influential relationships closest in proximity to the name in the physical map. You might use different colors to indicate whether the person or institution is friendly to your position, unfriendly, or unknown.

Step 5: Make a Plan

The Power map itself is a first step in figuring out an advocacy organization's strategies. After the map is completed, it is used to decide how and where to take action. What might be possible strategies for DFA-AnyCity?

In the example, two nodes of power present themselves as avenues of influence.

1) Influence the Mayor
- Lobby Day. Groups meet with the mayor.
- Media campaign. LTEs, news conference, and a high visibility rally outside the mayor's office.

2) Coalition Building
- Conservation groups sign on the bird watching group onto an anti-Wal -Mart coalition.
- Public awareness campaign on over-development and its dangers to birds.