



The Power Awareness Tool 2.0

Introduction

The Power Awareness Tool helps partners to make power relations more visible. This way it becomes easier for partners to reflect on their power relations and agree on changes where necessary. This is the first major update of the Power Awareness Tool. The first version, the PAT 1.0, was launched by Partos in February 2020. Since then, several Partos members and their partners have been using the PAT. In 2022 the PAT 1.0 was evaluated. The evaluation examined user experiences of the Power Awareness Tool among Partos members and their Southern partners, mainly in the context of the partnerships that have been established in the framework of the Power of Voices programme. Over 70 users contributed to the evaluation.

Conclusion of the evaluation: in most cases the Power Awareness Tool works. A large majority of respondents (79%) indicated that the PAT exercise did lead or will lead to follow-up actions to balance power relation between the partners. Almost half of the respondents reported enhanced awareness about the power relations. One-third stated that the PAT allowed them to identify areas of improvement within their partnership cycle. For a quarter of the respondents, the correction of existing misconceptions about the amount of power that different partners had, was an important benefit. Other benefits include: enhanced trust between partners and finding common agreements on how decisions should be made in the partnership. 94% of the respondents would like to make the PAT a regular part of their partnership cycle. They expect that repeating the PAT at regular intervals would increase the likelihood to generate lasting results.

According to the respondents of the survey, there are three areas in which the PAT 1.0 could be improved. These include:

- More detailed guidelines for identifying the decision-making topics (41%)
- More guidelines for arriving at action points (33%).
- More explanation for the person facilitating the use of the PAT (22%)

Furthermore, 85% of the respondents were interested in an improved digital version of the tool.

In December 2022, we brainstormed with a group of users how the tool could be improved. The ideas have been incorporated in this new version of the Power Awareness Tool, the PAT 2.0.



Why using the Power Awareness Tool?

As the name suggests, the PAT makes partners aware about power relations in partnerships. Whereas power has many dimensions, the PAT focuses specifically on decision making power in partnerships. The core question in a PAT session is about: who in a partnership is taking decisions about what. This is important, because in many partnerships this is not very clear. Power is often exercised implicitly. Decisions are being taken while not necessarily everyone is aware that this is happening. Often nobody has any quarrel with this. Maybe everyone agrees with the decision, or agrees that the ones who have taken the decision, have the mandate to do so. However, there are also situations in which some partners feel unhappy about how a decision has been taken. They believe that they have not been involved in a proper way. Maybe they believe they should have been the ones to take this decision., or they had wanted to have an equal vote in taking the decision. Maybe they feel that they have not been properly consulted. If such situations happen frequently, it may lead to frictions that undermine the partnership. The PAT helps to anticipate such situations by making partners more aware of where decision-making power is located in the partnership. The PAT makes power visible, and when it is visible, partners are in a position to discuss and agree on who should be involved in which way in taken certain decisions. This way the partnership is more likely to remain healthy.

Please note, that the PAT does not prescribe how partners should be involved in decision-making. That is up to the partners themselves to agree on. The PAT helps to have a frank and open-minded dialogue about how partners should be involved in decision-making.

“A sometimes-mentioned fear amongst Dutch CSOs is that using the PAT could result in friction in the relationship between partners. The majority of the respondents, however, reported no friction with their partners after having a discussion on the power relations that existed between them through the PAT exercise (67%) while a small percentage (18%) reported some friction with their partners” (Quote from the evaluation of the Power Awareness Tool).



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Preparation - Guidelines for the facilitator

A PAT session needs a facilitator. That can be a facilitator from within the partnership, or an external facilitator. From the evaluation of the PAT 1.0 we found that most partnerships prefer working with an external, neutral facilitator. In order to avoid a Northern or Southern bias in the facilitation, it was suggested to work with a team of two facilitators, one from the North and one from the South.

When participants are invited, it is important that they are properly informed about what to expect and what is expected from them. A few essential elements need to be included in the invitation:

- Participants need to be informed who within the partnership initiated this PAT session and why.
- Participants should know that this is going to be a learning exercise, and not about holding each other accountable. If the PAT is used in a partnership that has been in existence for some time, the purpose is to reflect on how decisions have been taken in the past and to find out whether there is a need to change the decision-making process. If the PAT is used in a partnership that has just started, the purpose is to find out how partners should be involved in decision making in the future.
- Participants should feel safe that if they share their sincere thoughts about decision making in the past or in the future, that this will not be used in any way against them.
- In preparation of the PAT exercise, participants can be asked to do some homework by listing at least one important decision taken in the partnership in the past, that they would like to be reflected on in the PAT session (or in the case of a starting partnership to list at least one important decision to be taken in the near future). It is important to emphasize that in the PAT session the discussion will NOT focus on content, whether the decision was good or bad. In the PAT session participants will reflect on the decision-making process. *Core questions that will be addressed in the PAT session are: Who was involved in taking this decision and how? Are we satisfied with the decision-making process, or is there room for improvement?*
- Participants should know that the average PAT session will take about half a day. It is possible to have a face-to-face workshop, or an online workshop.
- Partners should be represented by a person who knows how their organization is involved in decision making processes in the partnership.

The agenda of a PAT session

A typical PAT session has the following agenda:

- Introduction
- Warm-up
- Step 1. Identification of important decisions (to be) made in the partnership
- Step 2. Determining the actual level of participation in decision making
- Step 3. Reflection the actual level of participation in decision making
- Step 4. Determining the desired level of participation in decision making
- Step 5. Action to be taken in order to realise the desired level of participation



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Introduction

Participants introduce themselves and the facilitator explains who within the partnership initiated this PAT session and why. The facilitator explains the purpose of the PAT session, similar to what was explained in the invitation (see the above guidelines for preparation)

Warm-up

For participants to get to know each other a little better, and to get in the right mood for a dialogue, it is good to start with a warm-up or icebreaker game. If you look for inspiration, the table below has a few resources:

Warm-up and icebreaker games	
For face-to-face workshops	For virtual workshops
https://teambuilding.com/blog/large-group-energizers	https://www.collaboard.app/warm-up-and-ice-breaker-games-to-play-with-online-whiteboard
https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Energisers.pdf	https://www.mural.co/blog/online-warm-ups-energizers
https://symondsresearch.com/quick-icebreakers/	https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/online-energizers/



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Step 1. Identification of important decisions to be made in the partnership

Participants are asked to take some 15-20 minutes for themselves to contemplate decision making in the partnership. Each participant should come up with at least one important decision taken in the partnership in the past, that they would like to be reflected on in the PAT session. If the PAT is used in a starting partnership that does not have a long track-record of decision-making, participants should be asked to think of at least one important decision to be taken in the near future.

Subsequently, the facilitator makes a list of all these decisions. If some of the participants mention the same decision or the same type of decisions, these are grouped together in one category.

The facilitator draws a matrix as is shown below, with in the top row all the partners next to each other. Subsequently all decisions that participants come up with, are listed in the first column.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries						
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation						
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference						
Etc.						
Etc.						
Etc.						



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Step 2. Determining the actual level of participation in decision making

For each of the decisions listed in the first column of the matrix, the actual level of participation in taking this decision is assessed and scored for each partner¹. For this we use the ladder of participation in decision-making in diagram 1. Depending on the level of participation, the score will range between 0 (not involved) and 4 (partner decides).

Diagram 1. Ladder of participation in decision-making



4. Partner decides
3. Partner co-decides
2. Partner is consulted before a decision is made
1. Partner is informed about decision-making, but has no say
0. Partner is not informed in the decision-making and excluded from the decision making process

For example, take row two of the matrix below concerning decisions about the allocation of funds between countries. It is indicated here that partners A and B usually take these decisions together, after having consulted with partners C and E. The only involvement of partners D and F is, that they are being informed after decisions about the allocation of funds have been taken.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation						
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference						

Subsequently, all rows are filled in the same way as in the above given example. From practice we have learned that this is a rather straightforward process. However, if partners have diverging perspectives of the way they themselves or others are involved in the decision making, the facilitator needs to lead partners in a discussion in which they share evidence and experiences on what actually happened when these decisions were made..

¹ If it is a partnership under development, participants will discuss the level of participation each partner should have and determine the scores accordingly. Depending on the level of influence, the score will range between 0 (not involved) and 4 (partner decides).



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Step 3. Reflection on the actual level of participation

At the end of step 2, the matrix could look like in the example below. This overview shows how these decisions are actually being taken.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F	Happy?
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1	
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation	4	2	2	1	2	0	
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference	2	3	1	1	3	1	

In step 3 the facilitator takes the group through the list of decisions, one by one. With regard to each of these decisions the facilitator asks the question: *Are we happy with the way partners are involved in taking these type of decisions?*

- In case everyone is happy the facilitator puts a smiley
- In case one or more partners are not happy the facilitator puts a sad emoticon icon in the last column

The end result of this exercise could look like in the example below.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F	Happy?
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1	☺
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation	4	2	2	1	2	0	☹
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference	2	3	1	1	3	1	☺

All decisions marked with a sad emoticon icon are the type of decisions that require a different approach. These will be taken to the next step 4. In the table above, that would be the case for the decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation.



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Step 4. Determining the desired level of participation

In step 4 we focus only on those decisions indicated with a sad emoticon icon. Apparently, one or more partners believe that they should have been involved in a different way in taking these decision.

For each of these decisions, the question needs to be answered: *How do we want partners in the future to be involved in taking such decisions?*

To answer this question the facilitator needs to guide participants in a discussion that ideally should lead to consensus about the desired level of participation of each partner.

The desired level of participation is indicated with a different color in the matrix.

For example, in the table below the desired level of participation is indicated in blue.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F	Happy?
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1	☺
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation	4 3	2 3	2 3	1 2	2 3	0 1	☹ ☺
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference	2	3	1	1	3	1	☺



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Step 5. Action to be taken in order to achieve the desired level of participation

In the fifth and final step of the PAT exercise participants have to figure out what action needs to be taken in order to get to the desired level of participation. Of course, this is only applicable to types of decision making where the desired level of participation differs from the actual level of participation.

In our example, it would be only applicable to decisions about selecting a team of consultants to evaluate the programme. In the last column below contains a summary of the type of action to be taken in order to achieve the desired level of participation in decision making about hiring consultants to evaluate the programme.

Example

Important decisions	Partner A	Partner B	Partner C	Partner D	Partner E	Partner F	Happy?	Action to be taken
Example 1: Decision about allocation of funds between countries	3	3	2	1	2	1	☺	Not applicable
Example 2: Decision to select a team of consultants to conduct an evaluation	4 3	2 3	2 3	1 2	2 3	0 1	☹ ☺	A, B, C, and E decide on terms of reference for consultants D is invited to comment of terms of reference F is informed about the ToR and the selection process A makes a short list of technical and financial proposals A, B, C, and E select team of consultants A informs all partners about the decision.
Example 3: Decision who will represent the partnership in an important international conference	2	3	1	1	3	1	☺	Not applicable



Frequently asked questions

Q- Can the PAT also be used within organisations to analyse power relations between different parts of the organization? Can it be used for example by an international NGO with head-quarters in one country and country offices in several countries.

A- This is possible. Instead of analysing power relations between partners the participants will analyse power relations between the different offices, units and gremia.

Q- What to do if there are too many partners to invite them all to a PAT session? This can for example be the case, if a national partner works with dozens or hundreds of local partners, spread over the country.

A- In that case it is possible to invite one or a few typical local partners, assuming that their perspective on power is representative for the group. In case of doubt, it is important to test this assumption afterwards. This can be done through asking some of the other partners who were not present at the session whether the opinions of the ones representing them.

Q- We want to include the donor in our analysis, but we do not want the donor to participate in the PAT session. What to do?

A- It is possible to have one participant acting as the donor in the PAT session. It is important to be aware that this 'stand-in' donor representative might not understand the donor perspective completely.