

Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture¹

What follows is a set of Eurocentric cultural norms for interactions and processes within organizations. The characteristics and related communication styles are described for each norm. The characteristics listed below may become oppressive behaviours when they are used as standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group.

Norm	Characteristics	Communication Style
Defensiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because of ‘either/or’ thinking, criticism of those with power is viewed as threatening and inappropriate (or rude) • People respond to new or challenging ideas with defensiveness, making it difficult to raise these ideas • The defensiveness of people in power creates an oppressive culture 	Value for respect of hierarchical structures Overly-sensitive or Inflexible
Objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A belief that objectivity is preferable to showing emotions which are inherently destructive, irrational and damaging to decision-making or group process • Requiring people to think in a linear fashion and ignoring or invalidating those who think in other ways • Impatience with any thinking that does not appear logical to those with power • Closely related to Worship of the Written Word demonstrated through a bias toward written documentation without considering other ways to share information 	Value for rationality and neutrality Dismissive or Aloof
Perfectionism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little appreciation expressed among people for the work that others are doing • Appreciation that is expressed is usually directed to those who get most of the credit anyway • Pointing out either how the person or work is inadequate, or talking to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work 	Value for facts, tasks and logic over feelings Bulldozing
Power- or Knowledge-Hoarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little value for sharing power, resources and information • Those with power feel threatened by suggested changes • Those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ignorant, emotional or inexperienced 	Value for control Cautious or Mistrustful
Sense of Urgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous sense of urgency that makes it difficult to be inclusive, democratic or thoughtful about decision-making • Sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results (eg., sacrificing interests of racialized people to win victories for white people) • Reinforced by funding proposals which promise too much work for too little money and by funders who expect too much for too little 	Value for results and quick decision-making Driver

¹ Jones, K., & Okum, T. Showing Up for Racial Justice. (n.d.) From [Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups](https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html). *White supremacy culture characteristics*. Retrieved from www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html.

Antidotes to White Supremacy Culture

Defensiveness:	Understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege). Work on your own defensiveness. Discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission. When confronted with defensiveness, seek to explore the underlying interests (the reasons why X is important).
Either/Or Thinking:	Notice when people use either/or language and encourage the identification of more than two alternatives. Notice when people are simplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made. Slow things down by taking a break and give people some breathing room to think creatively and encourage a deeper analysis.
Fear of Open Conflict:	Roleplay ways to handle conflict before it happens. Set group guidelines in advance of, or during, moments that may become contentious. Avoid using the ways in which issues are raised as an excuse to not address concerns or differences. Once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently.
Objectivity:	Realize that everybody has a world view and that everybody's world view affects the way they understand things. Sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you. Assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is.
Perfectionism:	Develop a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to make sure that people's work and efforts are appreciated. Develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes which offer opportunities for learning and may sometimes lead to positive results. When offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism and separate the person from the mistake.
Power-hoarding:	Include commitments about power-sharing, accessing resources and building capacity in others in value statements, operating principles, collaboration agreements and / or group guidelines. Ensure people understand that a good leader develops others and understands that constructive criticism can be healthy and productive.
Sense of Urgency:	Learn from past experience how long things take and implement realistic workplans that leave space for discussion and unanticipated delays. Discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusion and diversity, and be clear about decision-making processes, especially in an atmosphere of urgency.
Worship of the Written Word:	Accept and notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach. Look for the tendency of a group or a person to keep pushing the same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way and then name it. When working with communities that differ culturally from your organization, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities' ways of doing things. Never assume that you or your organization know what's best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community.