Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

Perfectionism

- Little appreciation expressed for others' work
- Criticism more common
- Criticism of person or their work *in their absence* even more common
- Mistakes seen as personal failings
- **ANTIDOTES**: Develop a culture of appreciation; develop a learning organization, where it's expected that everyone makes mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning

Sense of Urgency

- Continued sense of little time that undermines inclusivity, and/or democratic and thoughtful decision-making
- This sacrifices potential allies in favor of quick or highly visible results
- Reinforced by funding proposals that promise (and funders that expect) too much for too little
- **ANTIDOTES**: Realistic workplans; leadership that understands that things take longer than anyone expects; discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time; write realistic funding proposals

Defensiveness

- Organization and energy focused on preventing abuse and protecting those in power
- Criticism of those with power viewed as inappropriate
- Difficult to raise new or challenging ideas
- Energy devoted to avoiding hurt feelings and working around defensive people
- **ANTIDOTES**: Understand how defensiveness is linked to fear (of losing power, face, comfort, privilege); name defensiveness as a problem when it is one

Quantity Over Quality

- Measurable things are most valued
- Little value attached to process
- Discomfort with emotion and feelings
- **ANTIDOTES**: Include process goals in planning; develop a values statement about how work will be done in the organization; develop methods for measuring process; recognize when you need to get off the agenda to address people's feelings and underlying concerns

Worship of the Written Word

- Those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in orgs where ability to relate to others is key
- The org doesn't value other ways in which information gets shared
- **ANTIDOTES**: Analyze other ways people get and share information; come up with alternative ways to document what is happening; work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization; make sure anything written can be clearly understood (is jargon-free)

Only One Right Way

- Belief there is one right way to do things and that people will learn and adopt it
- When they do not, then something is wrong with *them*
- **ANTIDOTES**: Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal; notice and name behavior when folks/groups push "one right way"; acknowledge you have a lot to learn from community partners' way of doing; be willing to adapt; never assume you/the organization knows what's best for others

Paternalism

- Decision-making clear to those with power; unclear to those without it
- Those with power feel capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power
- Those with power don't view as important or necessary understanding the views/experience of those for whom they decide
- **ANTIDOTES**: Ensure transparency about decision-making; include people affected by decisions in the process

Either/Or Thinking

- Things are either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us
- No sense that things can be both/and
- Results in oversimplifying complex things
- Increases sense of urgency that we must do this or that, without time to consider a middle way
- **ANTIDOTES**: When people use 'either/or' language, push for more than two alternatives; when people simplify complex issues, encourage deeper analysis; with urgent decisions, make sure people have time to think creatively

Power Hoarding

- Little value around sharing power
- Those with power feel threatened when change is suggested & experience this as a judgement of them
- They also assume they have everyone's best interests at heart, and that those wanting change are ill-informed, emotional, or inexperienced
- **ANTIDOTES**: Include power-sharing in your org's values statement; discuss that good leaders develop the power and skills of others; understand that change is inevitable and that challenges to leadership can be productive and healthy

Fear of Open Conflict

- People in power try to ignore or run from conflict
- When someone raises an "issue," response is to blame that person rather than look at the issue
- Emphasis on being polite, so raising difficult issues is being impolite, rude, or out-of-line
- **ANTIDOTES**: Role play ways to handle conflict before it happens; distinguish between politeness and raising hard issues; once a conflict is resolved, reflect on how it was resolved and/or might have been handled differently

Individualism

- Little experience or comfort working as part of a team
- People feel responsible for solving problems alone
- Accountability goes up and down, not sideways to peers or those whom the organization serves
- Desire for individual recognition and credit
- Competition valued over collaboration
- **ANTIDOTES**: Include teamwork in your org values statement; make sure that credit is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders; practice group (not individual) accountability; use meetings to solve problems, not just report activities

I'm the Only One

- Connected to individualism, the belief that if something is going to get done right, *I* have to do it
- Little or no ability to delegate work to others
- **ANTIDOTES**: Evaluate people based on their ability to delegate to others; evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals

Progress is Bigger, More

- Observed in systems of accountability and success measurement
- Progress is an org that expands (adds staff, projects, etc.) or serves more people (regardless of quality of service)
- Gives no value, not even negative value, to the costs of this so-called progress
- **ANTIDOTES**: Ask how actions today will affect people seven generations from now; ensure that any cost/benefit analysis includes *all* costs, not just financial ones; ask those you work with and for to evaluate your/org performance

Objectivity

- Belief that objectivity is possible
- That emotions should not play a role in decision-making or group processes
- Requiring people to think in a linear fashion and ignoring those who think in other ways
- Impatience with any thinking that does not appear logical
- **ANTIDOTES**: Realize that everybody's perspective is shaped by their worldview; realize this means you, too; push yourself to sit with discomfort when people express themselves in ways unfamiliar to you; assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand it

Right to Comfort

- Belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort
- Scapegoating those who cause discomfort
- Equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism that targets people of color
- **ANTIDOTES**: Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning; don't take everything personally

WE CAN DO BETTER!

Antidotes Quick-Start Guide

- **Create a culture of appreciation**: publicly express gratitude for people's work and contributions
- **Choose integrity** and actively refuse to participate in gossip
- **Foster a culture of learning** where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities
- **Understand that defensiveness is linked to fear** (of losing power, face, privilege, comfort)
- **Identify other antidotes already in place** within the organization and seek ways to highlight and build upon them

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