

CHARACTERISTICS OF WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE



Worship of the Written Word

Symptoms:

- If it's not in a memo, it doesn't exist.
- Those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where the ability to relate to others is key to the mission.
- If it's not grammatically "correct," it has no value.
- If it's not properly cited according to academic rules that many people don't know or have access to, it's not legitimate.
- Little value placed on non-written ways info gets shared.
- An inability or refusal to acknowledge information that is shared through stories, embodied knowing, intuition, and the wide range of ways that we learn and know.
- Continued frustration that people and communities don't respond to written communication. Blaming people and communities for their failure to respond.
- Collectively and generationally informed in a context where systemic racism privileges the writing and wisdom of people in the white group.
- Academic standards require "original" work when our knowledge and knowing almost always builds on the knowledge and knowing of others/of each other.
- Claiming "ownership" of (written) knowledge to meet ego needs rather than understanding the importance of offering what you write and know to grow and expand the community's knowing.

Antidotes:

- Take the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information.
- Figure out what actually needs to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening.
- Encourage creative ways of documenting, recording, or reflecting what you are learning and what you feel you know.
- Work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization. For example, the ability to build relationships with those who are important to the organization's mission.
- Make sure anything written can be clearly understood (avoid academic language, 'buzz' words, etc.).
- Develop your skills individually and collectively to gather information through different ways of knowing.
- Identify when circumstances require documentation on others' terms and bring transparency to how you respond (legal documents, funder applications, government forms, etc.).
- Dedicate time to practicing and honoring other ways of knowing and expressing: oral storytelling, embodied learning, visual & movement art, silence, meditation, singing, dancing.
- Practice listening. Our culture doesn't value oral traditions or storytelling wisdom, so we are out of practice listening and remembering how to hold a spoken word with weight without having to write it down.
- Acknowledge and honor diverse and interconnected sources of wisdom.
- Honor the value of collaborative and collective knowledge.
- Appreciate when others learn from and expand on your knowledge and writing.
- See yourself and position yourself as one person in a stream of knowing and learning.