Leading Change: Using CPM leadership behaviors as antidotes to white supremacy culture characteristics

The content in this handout is adapted from the work of Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones on white supremacy culture characteristics and the corresponding antidotes. The original piece is at https://www.dismantlingracism.org/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/okun_-_white_sup_culture.pdf. This handout is further enhanced by the work of Jennifer Buchholz from the Bay Area Academy that crosswalks the CPM Leadership Behaviors with the antidotes to white supremacy culture characteristics. Some of the crosswalks also include "Readiness Factors" that represent attitudes, values or beliefs leaders can embrace to help activate antidote behaviors in the context of anti-racist practice. Some background on the white supremacy culture characteristics that show up in our organizations from Okun and Jones:

"…Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify. These characteristics are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group. They are also damaging because they promote white supremacy thinking. Because we all live in a white supremacy culture, these characteristics show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us – people of color and white people. Therefore, these attitudes and behaviors can show up in any group or organization, whether it is white-led or predominantly white or people of color-led or predominantly people of color."

White Supremacy Culture Characteristics

Perfectionism

- Little appreciation expressed among people for the work that others are doing; appreciation that is expressed usually directed to those who get most of the credit anyway

- More common is to point out either how the person or work is inadequate

- Or even more common, to talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work without ever talking directly to them

- Mistakes are seen as personal, i.e., they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are – mistakes

- Making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong

- Little time, energy, or money put into reflection or identifying lessons learned that can improve practice, in other words little or no learning from mistakes

- Tendency to identify what's wrong; little ability to identify, name, an appreciate what's right

- Often internally felt, in other words the perfectionist fails to appreciate her own good work, more often pointing out his faults or 'failures,' focusing on inadequacies and mistakes rather than learning from them; the person works with a harsh and constant inner critic

CROSSWALK: Perfectionism antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Readiness Factors—Realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work, often contributes to low morale among the group, and does not help you or the group to realize the benefit of learning from mistakes.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Emphasize a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to make sure that people's work and efforts are appreciated.	Engagement	Recognize staff strengths & successes
• Develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning. • Create an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results.		Create a learning environment
• Ask people to offer specific suggestions for how to do thing differently when they offer critical feedback.		Engage staff in implementation and system improvement

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Ask people to include specific suggestions for how to do things differently when they offer critical feedback.	Inquiry	Seek feedback
• Separate person from the mistake – when offering feedback speak to things that went well before offering criticism.	Accountability	Listen and provide feedback

Sense of urgency

- Continued sense of urgency that makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think long-term, to consider consequences

- Frequently results in sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results, for example sacrificing interests of communities of color in order to win victories for while people (seen as default or norm community)

- Reinforced by funding proposals which promise too much work for too little money and by funders who expect too much for too little

CROSSWALK: Sense of urgency antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency.	Foundational	Be open, honest, clear, and respectful in your communications
• Realize that rushing decisions takes more time in the long run. Inevitably, people who didn't get a chance to voice their thoughts and feelings will at best resent and at worst undermine the decision because they were left unheard.	Engagement	Show that you care
• Discuss what it means to set goals around anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and other forms of resistance to structural oppression. • Dedicate time to support individual and organizational learning, and collectively herald structural changes that give rise to inclusion and diversity.		Create a learning environment
• Learn to make practical work plans that set up people for success.	Advocacy	Promote advocacy

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Understand that things take longer than anyone usually expects. Leadership should build in flexibility and suppleness during times when urgency seems to pervade the workflow and/or workplace culture.	Accountability	Listen and provide feedback
• Take the time needed to learn from past experiences & find a feasible, consistent method for documenting and/or preserving those learnings.		Hold each other accountable

Defensiveness

- The organizational structure is set up and much energy spent trying to prevent abuse and protect power as it exists rather than to facilitate the best out of each person or to clarify who has power and how they are expected to use it

- Because of either/or thinking (see below), criticism of those with power is viewed as threatening and inappropriate (or rude)

- People respond to new or challenging ideas with defensiveness, making it very difficult to raise these ideas

- A lot of energy in the organization is spent trying to make sure that people's feelings aren't getting hurt or working around defensive people

- White people spend energy defending against charges of racism rather than examining how racism might actually be happening

- The defensiveness of people in power creates an oppressive culture

CROSSWALK: Defensiveness antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Readiness Factors—Understand that structure cannot, in and of itself, facilitate or prevent abuse; understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege); be willing to work on your own defensiveness; have the courage to name defensiveness as a problem when it is one.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Foster a culture of self-reflexivity in which people are supported and challenged to work on their own defensiveness. • Develop an organizational culture of caring and direct critical feedback—people are frequently capable of handling more than others expect, especially when there is a foundation of trust and care.	Accountability	Listen and provide feedback
• Discuss the ways in which defensiveness and resistance to new ideas get in the way of the organization's mission.		Monitor organizational effectiveness

Quantity over quality

- All resources of the organization are directed toward producing measurable goals

- Things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that cannot, for example numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, money spent are valued more than quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, ability to constructively deal with conflict

- Little or no value attached to process; if it can't be measured, it has no value

- Discomfort with emotion and feelings

- No understanding that when there is a conflict between content (the agenda of the meeting) and process (people's need to be heard or engaged), process will prevail (for example, you may get through the agenda, but if you haven't paid attention to people's need to be heard, the decisions made at the meeting are undermined and/or disregarded)

CROSSWALK: Quantity over quality antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

*Readiness Factors—*Be willing to lead the organization in measuring important equity goals (such as inclusivity, power sharing, etc.) in ways that demonstrate progress toward achievement of these aspirations.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Include process or quality goals in your planning; look for ways to measure them. • Make sure your organization has a values statement or some other anchor that expresses how it wants to do its work. Consider this a living document, one that people use in their day-to-day work.	Accountability	Monitor organizational effectiveness
• Learn to recognize those times when you need to get off the agenda in order to address people's underlying concerns.		Monitor practice effectiveness

Worship of the written word

- If it's not in a memo, it doesn't exist

- The organization does not take into account or value other ways in which information gets shared

- Those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where ability to relate to others is key to the mission

CROSSWALK: *Worship of the written word* antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Make sure anything written can be clearly understood (avoid academic language, jargon, spell out acronyms or provide a glossary)	Foundational	Be open, honest, clear, and respectful in your communications
• Take time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information. • Consider alternative ways to document the work (e.g., video documentation, audio recordings)		Be accountable
• 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).	Engagement	Recognize staff strengths and successes

Only one right way

- The belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it

- When they do not adapt or change, then something is wrong with them (the other, not those changing), not with us (those who 'know' the right way)

- Similar to the missionary who does not see value in the culture of other communities, sees only value in their beliefs about what is good

CROSSWALK: Only one right way antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

*Readiness Factors—*Work on developing the ability to notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach; look for the tendency for a group or 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.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal and be open to alternative routes. • Once group has made a decision, honor that decision and see what can be learned from that way.	Engagement	Engage staff in implementation and system improvement
• When working with communities from a different culture, be clear on what you have still to learn about their ways of doing; never assume that you or your organization know what is best for other communities. • Humility is essential in developing meaningful relationships with communities whose cultural background is different.	Teaming	Build partnerships Work with partners

Paternalism

- Decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it

- Those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interest of those without power

- Those with power often don't think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions

- Those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does

- Those without power do not really know how decisions get made and who makes what decisions, and yet they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them

CROSSWALK: Paternalism antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Ensure everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions in the organization. • Be as transparent as possible about the reasons for any decision being made without the input or against the input of people involved. • Distinguish between appropriate confidentiality and discretion around sensitive information and an expedient lack of transparency.	Foundational	Be open, honest, clear, and respectful in your communications
• Cultivate transparency and open dialogue around decision-making practices. Ensure that everyone has a part in important decisions.	Engagement	Engage staff in implementation and system improvement Show that you care
• Meaningfully include those who are impacted by decisions in the decision-making process.	Inquiry / Teaming	Seek feedback Work with partners
• Make sure everyone knows and understands their level of authority and responsibility in the organization.	Accountability	Hold each other accountable

Either/or thinking

- Things are either/or—good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us

- Closely linked to perfectionism in making it difficult to learn from mistakes or accommodate conflict

- No sense that things can be both/and

- Results in trying to simplify the complex, for example, believing that poverty is simply the result of lack of education

- Creates conflict and increases sense of urgency, as people feel they have to make decisions to do either this or that, with no time or encouragement to consider alternatives, particularly those which may require more time or resources

- Often used by those with a clear agenda or goal to push those who are still thinking or reflecting to make a choice between 'a' or 'b' without acknowledging a need for time and creativity to come up with more options

CROSSWALK: *Either/or thinking* antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Recognize when people use 'either/or' language and push to come up with more than two alternatives. • Notice when people are simplifying complex issues, especially when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made; slow it down and encourage people to do a deeper analysis.	Engagement	Engage staff in implementation and system improvement
• When people are faced with an urgent decision, if possible, take a pause and give people some breathing room to think creatively.	Teaming	Model teaming
• Equip your team with the tools to think in more complex and nuanced ways.	Accountability	Monitor organizational effectiveness Monitor practice effectiveness

Power hoarding

- Little, if any, value around sharing power

- Power seen as limited, only so much to go around

- Those with power feel threatened when anyone suggests changes in how things should be done in the organization, feel suggestions for change are a reflection on their leadership

- Those without power don't see themselves as hoarding power or as feeling threatened

- Those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed (stupid), emotional, inexperienced

CROSSWALK: Power hoarding antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Readiness Factors—Believe that change is inevitable and challenges to the existing power structure can be healthy and productive.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Discuss what good leadership looks like and ensure people understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others.	Foundational	Be open, honest, clear and respectful in your communications
• Cultivate leadership ideals that incorporate an understanding of the inevitability of change. Challenges to leadership are important for the health of the team and the organization.	Engagement	Create a learning environment
• Embed shared power in the organization's values statement, its structures and policies, and its day-to-day operations. • Resist and challenge competitiveness. Prioritize cooperation and collaboration. This helps shift the implicit assumptions about leaders and leadership that can prevent power sharing from occurring.	Teaming	Model teaming

Fear of open conflict

- People in power are scared of expressed conflict and try to ignore it or run from it

- When someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, the response is to blame the person for raising the issue rather than to look at the issue which is actually causing the problem

- Emphasis on being polite

- Equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude or out of line

CROSSWALK: *Fear of open conflict* antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

*Readiness Factors—*Be willing to accept the unavoidable discomfort of engaging in conflict as a means of strengthening the team and organization.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Role play ways to practice handling conflict *before* disputes happen.	Engagement	Create a learning organization
• Distinguish between being impolite and brining up difficult issues. Learn to hold truth-telling conversations as a team and help each other feel heard in these moments.	Accountability	Listen and provide feedback
• Once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it at a later point and consider how it might have been handled differently.		Monitor organizational effectiveness

Individualism

- Little experience or comfort working as part of a team

- People in organization believe they are responsible for solving problems alone

- Accountability, if any, goes up and down, not sideways to peers or to those the organization is set up to serve

- Desire for individual recognition and credit

- Leads to isolation

- Competition more highly valued than cooperation and where cooperation is valued, little time or resources devoted to developing skills in how to cooperate

- Creates a lack of accountability, as the organization values those who can get things done on their own without needing supervision or guidance

CROSSWALK: *Individualism* antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

*Readiness Factors—*Understand growth and success to be a matter of collective, rather than individual, achievement.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Ensure that the organization is working toward shared goals and that people have a collective intention to learn from mistakes together.	Engagement	Create a learning environment
• Foster a culture of mutual support where people feel safe bringing problems to the group.		Show that you care
• Make sure that recognition is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders or the most public person.		Recognize staff strengths and successes
• Embed teamwork and collaboration in the organization's values, structures, policies, and ways of doing. • Articulate that collaboration is a key skill you need in yourself and your team, and evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team and to accomplish shared goals.	Teaming	Model teaming

I'm the only one

- Connected to individualism, the belief that if something is going to get done right, then 'I' have to do it

- Little or no ability to delegate work to others

CROSSWALK: *I'm the only one* antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Readiness Factors—Understand growth and success to be a matter of collective, rather than individual, achievement.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Articulate that collaboration is a key skill you need in yourself and your team, and evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team and to accomplish shared goals. • Develop skills and capacity for responsibilities to be carried out by the level closest to the work and evaluate people on their ability to delegate appropriately.	Accountability	Hold each other accountable

Progress is bigger, more

- Observed in how we define success (success is always bigger, more)

- Progress is an organization which expands (adds staff, adds projects) or develops the ability to serve more people (regardless of how well they are serving them)

- Gives no value, not even negative value, to its cost; for example, increased accountability to funders as the budget grows, ways in which those we serve may be exploited, excluded, or underserved as we focus on how many we are serving instead of quality of serve or values created by the ways in which we serve

CROSSWALK: *Progress is bigger, more* antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Readiness Factors—Promote "Seventh Generation" thinking by considering how the actions of the organization will affect people seven generations from now; understand that costs can be more than fiscal, as an organization can also expend its human capital.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Make sure that any cost-benefit analysis includes all costs, not just financial ones. Human costs may include the impacts on morale, credibility, and use of resources. • Include process goals in your planning, such as how you want to do your work, not just what you want to do.	Accountability	Monitor organizational effectiveness
• Ask the people you work with to evaluate how growth and change management affects them.		Monitor practice effectiveness

Objectivity

- The belief that there is such a thing as being objective or 'neutral'

- The belief that emotions are inherently destructive, irrational, and should not play a role in decision-making or group process

- Invalidating people who show emotion

- Requiring people to think in a linear (logical) fashion and ignoring or invalidating those who think in other ways

- Impatience with any thinking that does not appear 'logical'

CROSSWALK: *Objectivity* antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors

Readiness Factors—Realize that everybody (including you) has a world view and that everyone's world view affects the way they understand things; assume that everyone has a valid point, and your job is to understand what that point is.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Respect that everybody has a valid and useful perspective, and it is the job of the collective to understand what that perspective is – even and perhaps especially through discomfort and/or disagreement.	Foundational	Be open, honest, clear, and respectful in your communications
• Challenge yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you. Continue to listen.		Be accountable
• Realize that everybody has a world view, and that this world view informs the way they understand things.	Engagement	Show that you care
• Work to expand your perspectives on what is counted as 'legitimate knowledge' versus what is dismissed. Validate emotional/affective, experiential, and ancestral knowledges as legitimate and powerful that are able to work in tandem with other knowledge forms to create expansive understanding and thinking.	Teaming	Work with partners

Right to comfort

- The belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort (another aspect of valuing 'logic' over emotion)

- Scapegoating those who cause discomfort

- Equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism which daily targets people of color

CROSSWALK: *Right to comfort* **antidotes & CPM leadership behaviors**

*Readiness Factors—*Be willing to welcome discomfort as a sign that growth and learning is not far behind; study racism and oppression to strengthen your understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into the larger societal picture; don't take everything personally.

Antidote	CPM Element ↓	CPM Leadership Behavior
• Personalize your reflections on racism and systemic oppression, rather than remaining within the theoretical and hypothetical ways of thinking.	Foundational	Be accountable
• Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning – its presence is often signaling the need for deep self-reflection.	Engagement	Create a learning environment