

Fear of Open Conflict

Looks like:

- People in power **avoid conflict and disagreement**.
- When someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, the response is to interrogate the person who highlighted the problem instead of interrogating the problem itself.
- **Politeness** is used to deny people the space to feel and to be themselves. For instance, when an employee is angered by racist acts committed against them, they are expected to mute their emotional reaction in the name of politeness and cordiality.
- Raising difficult issues is equated with being impolite, rude, or out of line. People in power might use this as **a way to maintain control** and silence those who challenge the organizational status quo.

Key Questions to Help Y'all Reflect and Discuss:

- How is feedback used to assess and improve programs and activities?
- If unexpected issues or developments occur how will they be addressed or responded to?
- What techniques are used to regularly check-in with colleagues and community members about needs, processes, and goals?
- What are the unconscious beliefs that I or my organization hold that create and sustain our fear of open conflict?
- How can I, or my organization, find ways to help manage my/our fear of open conflict, other than avoiding conflict altogether?
- To what extent do I or the organization have space for people to be themselves? What are the ways in which **self-reflexivity***, trust, and openness to being challenged are fostered in the collective culture?

***Self-reflexivity** is a way for you to super power your reflective process, and deepen on your path of personal growth.

Fear of Open Conflict (cont.)

Antidotes:

- **Role-play** ways to handle conflict before conflict happens.
- Distinguish between being impolite and bringing up difficult issues. Learn to hold **truth-telling conversations** as a team and help each other feel heard in these moments.
- Unlearn attitudes around 'acceptable' ways of calling attention to painful truths. Make space for emotions and think expansively about how problems are flagged in the organization.
- Once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it at a later point and consider how it might have been handled differently.