

How to have honest conversations

Tips for getting started

Yielding Power

- ☐ Have explicit one-on-one conversations with your black and brown colleagues about their experiences working with white people.

Don't have these conversations unless you are genuinely prepared to make changes as a result.

Don't have these conversations if you are not genuinely curious about the answers — black and brown colleagues will know if your interest and your intent is genuine.

- ☐ Start by saying: "I'm trying to work out how I can do better, as an individual and a colleague, to think about decolonisation and supporting genuinely locally-led work."
- ☐ Ask: "Would you be willing to help me work through this? I know this conversation might be difficult, and that we might both be a bit uncomfortable, but I'd really like to understand these issues from your perspective and learn from your experience. I understand if you don't want to, or if you don't feel comfortable having this conversation."

Note: Recognise that a power differential may make black and brown colleagues feel that they must have this conversation, even if they are not comfortable in doing so.

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- ☐ Share information with your white colleagues about the lived experience of colonialism in your family and community. Share your experiences of working with the effects of neo-colonialism in the development industry, and the impact that this has had on you.
- ☐ Reflect on your personal history and your formative experiences of white authority and control. Think about how those feed into the way you interact with white colleagues.

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Suggested questions and actions

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Questions to ask

- ☐ What has been your experience working with white people?
- ☐ What has made it easier for you to work with white people? What has made it harder?
- ☐ What could I do differently to better support locally led processes in our organisation?
- ☐ Do you think my race gives me privileges in our work together?
- ☐ What do you think I could do differently in terms of the way I work, or the processes I manage, to share that privilege?

Actions to do

- ☐ Create spaces where you can be open and vulnerable with other white colleagues to unpack colonisation in your industry and your own personal relationship with this.
- ☐ Black and brown colleagues need to understand you as a person who is part of a family and a community. If possible, introduce your family to your colleagues. Discuss your background, extended family, beliefs, and what you love doing — even if you are not used to bringing so much of the personal into your professional life! Spend time with black and brown colleagues out of the office.

Wielding Power

Questions to ask

- ☐ How was leadership practiced culturally in your world when you grew up, and to date? Was leadership passed on through generally recognised lines and processes? Did leaders have to continually prove themselves as worthy of their leadership position?
- ☐ How does your experience of leadership fit into how you engage with leadership when working with white people, or with INGOs?
- ☐ What excites you about the possibilities for more local leadership in the decolonisation and locally led agendas?

Actions to do

- ☐ Reflect on these issues with black and brown colleagues to support you as you think about what engaging in decolonisation and building locally led organisations and programs means for you personally.
- ☐ Be as you are with your black and brown colleagues. Although you might not usually expect to share personal space with white colleagues, consider how you might bring a white colleague closer, and not keep them at arm's length for fear of greater closeness being exploited.