

Centering Black, Indigenous, People of Color Through Racialized Workplace Conflict Resolution

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conflict is inevitable in the workplace and manifests in different ways. It is a common dysfunction when working in teams. A diversity of thoughts, ideologies, and beliefs always creates a risk of disagreement and misalignment. When examining identity and positionality in the workplace, conflict is usually resolved in favor of those who have identities within the dominant White culture. In light of this common reality, an opportunity is created to examine and determine how conflict can be resolved from an inclusive and equitable approach. This case study is designed to outline the tools and resources the Center for Equity and Inclusion uses with its clients when guiding organizations to resolve conflict, advance equity, and center Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational Background

All three of the authors work on, and our case study is derived from work on, race equity facilitation and consultation at the Center for Equity and Inclusion (CEI) in what is now unfortunately known as Portland, Oregon, but is actually the ancestral, rightful, unceded, occupied lands of the Indigenous peoples of the lower Columbia River. This includes Klickitat peoples, Cowlitz peoples, Multnomah, Wasco, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla, and many other peoples of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. CEI “is a specialized consulting agency focused on advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts within organizations, education systems and communities” (Center for Equity and Inclusion, n.d.). CEI was founded in late 2015 and “began as a foundation-driven initiative for non-profits to engage in a long-term, racial equity-focused model of organizational change. Given the immediate impact and success of our work, news spread quickly, and our work expanded into other sectors” (Center for Equity and Inclusion, n.d.). Over the last seven years, CEI has collaborated with over 120 organizations—including non-profits, foundations, civic organizations, municipalities, educational communities, and private sector companies—to vision and implement long-term personal, cultural, and institutional transformational change through training, dialogue facilitation, system design, and leadership development.

Important to CEI, and this chapter, is the fact that our organization is, and always has been, led by BIPOC visionaries. At the outset, CEI was founded by nationally recognized facilitators and trainers, Hanif Fazal and Frewine Kiros. Kiros describes herself and her experience as,

An effective facilitator, manager, business owner, and entrepreneur, who has a depth of experience in both the non-profit and business sector. I began my career as an advocate for Portland, Oregon’s most at-risk youth, and quickly rose in leadership by becoming a Program Manager and Lead Facilitator. As a facilitator, I have led numerous youth programs, racial equity professional development courses for professionals, and facilitation skill development for beginning and seasoned facilitators. (Center for Equity and Inclusion, n.d.)

Fazal recounts his experiences by saying,

I have spent over 20 years addressing issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. For seven of those years, I worked within a nonprofit organization and helped lead a transformative process to advance equity and inclusion across all aspects of the organization. This experience was pivotal as it helped me understand that a transformative process focused on equity and inclusion is possible...Additionally, I had the opportunity to work regionally, nationally, and internationally with numerous organizations across the fields of education, philanthropy, for-profit, and nonprofit sectors, helping them to plan and strategically advance equity and inclusion efforts within organizations or system wide. (Center for Equity and Inclusion, n.d.)

Even as CEI has become larger, Kiros and Fazal have greatly expanded their activities, reach, responsibilities, and communities.

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