

Feminist Leadership & Discomfort

Hosted by Serap Altinisik, Anusha Bharadwaj and Emily Bove

"The personal is political" has long been a slogan and key tenet of feminist movements. So how does that apply to discomfort? What role does discomfort play in Feminist Leadership? And why do we need to take an intersectional approach to discomfort?

Three members of the FAIR SHARE Action Circle - Serap Altinisik, Anusha Bharadwaj and Emily Bove - guided us in a discussion of these questions.

Being comfortable with discomfort is at the heart of transformation.
Anusha Bharadwaj

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"Ultimately every human being on this planet fears discomfort [...] And whilst for some this fear may be more real than for others, it is the perception of external risk – to our safety, to our self esteem, to our sense of belonging – that makes us adjust our behaviour, often causing us to flee from the problem or armour up and pretend it's not there." Brene Brown

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The intersectionality of discomfort

For many people discomfort is a regular part of how they experience the world, but their discomfort is normalised and goes unacknowledged. For those with more privilege/power, their discomfort is often hypervisible and met with concern. This goes beyond organisational titles; it's also to do with race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and other aspects of our identities and positionalities.

What you can do

- Call others in and also be ready to support them through their discomfort
- Consider how your own discomfort could be a reflection of your privilege
- Whether on your own or with others, take the time needed to process and resolve discomfort, including holding space for silence
- Model vulnerability and use questions to make space for others to share: "I notice I feel X, how are others feeling?"
- If you think someone may be uncomfortable, check in with them privately and offer support
- Reframe the narrative on the spot: "What I should have said, based on what I just learned is..."
- Create more of your own scripts to help you respond (vs. freeze) in uncomfortable situations

More resources
Check out the Padlet boards from the session:

[What is purposeful discomfort?](#)

[What feminist tools do we have for discomfort?](#)