



**Welcome!**

# **Feminist Leadership & Discomfort**

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**FAIR SHARE**  
of Women Leaders

## **Our Vision**

We envision a global social impact sector that walks the talk on gender equality and embraces feminist principles and culture at all levels of our organisations.

## **We work towards this by:**

- 1) Monitoring the # of women leaders annually
- 2) Advocating for Feminist Leadership



# **Shared Principles**

**Confidentiality**

**Listening**

**Self-awareness**

**Discomfort**

**Interrupting**

**Power**

**Equal thinkers**

# Agenda

- 15:00 Welcome and Introduction
- 15:05 What is discomfort?
- 15:30 Purposeful discomfort
- 15:35 Break-out groups
- 15:55 Our experience with discomfort
- 16:10 Break-out groups
- 16:25 Closing

“Ultimately every human being on this planet fears discomfort and harm that may be done against them. 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.”

- **(Brown, 2013:113)**

# What is discomfort?

## Discomfort:

- **personal**
- **political**
- **collective**
- **institutional**

Today, we want to discuss on the moments of discomfort we experience on the feminist leadership journey. We won't be talking about the effects and consequences of trauma (we are not equipped to do so here and now). We know this topic could be connected to a bigger conversation of trauma.

# What is discomfort?

## Definition of discomfort:

Verb: make (someone) feel uneasy, anxious, or embarrassed.

Words we have put behind it:  
performative empathy,  
incomprehension, passive  
aggressiveness.

discomfort as process  
vs. as moment

**Which words do you associate with discomfort?**

# Whose discomfort are we talking about?

And why is it important?

**For many people discomfort is usual.**

Discomfort is the daily truth for many, discomfort is part of the lives of everyone non-white non-male etc. person.

How to create space for those unheard and those invisible when put onto a continuum?

**Discomfort and power dynamics:**

Understanding different power dynamics goes beyond just organisational power dynamics such as job titles etc.:

- Power dynamics of gender, race, class, ability and other intersections will always be there
- These different dynamics require looking beyond roles and understand which privileges you bring.

**Whose voices are we not hearing to resolve discomfort?**

# An intersectional feminist approach to discomfort

Personal vs. political

Feminist leadership focus

Vulnerability and discomfort

I will understand that my discomfort can reflect my privilege

I will face discomfort

I am feminist, but...

...I will call out the discomfort to create space

Do no harm when expressing my own discomfort

...I will support and hold someone through discomfort

# Purposeful discomfort: A tool for feminist leadership.

Feminist leadership is creating the space for purposeful discomfort:

- Organisation and individuals can play a role in bringing discomfort down, by creating new discomfort
- ...by intentionally making space for calling in those living with prejudice and biases and intentionally supporting those whose experiences have usually not been recognised.
- Many women, BIPOC or other marginalised people do not feel free to speak about their vulnerabilities, out of fear that discomfort will fuel back into stereotypes.
- By challenging this, it creates space for everyone to feel comfortable sharing.

**If one set of discomfort goes down, another goes up.  
And that one is much needed for transformation.**

## You will shortly join a break-out group

We ask you to reflect on the following questions:

- What does purposeful discomfort mean to you?
- Have you/would you/could you use it?

Please use the Padlet board to share your findings and thoughts.

# Break-out groups

# Our Experience with Discomfort at an Action Circle Meeting of FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders

## Lessons learned:

- Facing the discomfort instead of fleeing
  - How to point it out
  - Take the **time** to resolve it, including sharing a space in silence
  - How to become more **comfortable** in the discomfort
  - How to hold the process together?
  - The necessity of **trust and solidarity**
  - The importance of **listening**
- People had a chance to **reframe** immediately based on **relearning**.  
“What I should have said... based on what I just learned”  
This allows rebuild the narrative on the spot, so it wont live on.
- How to step in, making a bilateral discomfort a **collective dynamic**.

This conversation has led to the creation of a new intersectional approach of tracking/monitoring leadership by FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders [yearly Monitor Report](#).

## You will shortly join a break-out group

We ask you to reflect on the following question and share if you are willing:

- What are the feminist tools that you have, to resolve the discomfort?

Please use the Padlet board to share your findings and thoughts.

# Break-out groups

**We hope you enjoyed the session!**

 **@AnushaBharadwaj**

 **@EmilyFBove**

 **@SeeRap**

**Thank you!**

**Find resources from this session and  
others at [fairsharewl.org/  
explorefeministleadership-resources](https://fairsharewl.org/explorefeministleadership-resources)**

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**Thank you!**