

Tool 25: Decolonising organisations

This tool helps you to question where the knowledge, systems and practice of your organisation came from using an intersectional lens, so that you can increase equity by accessing other knowledge and experience.

Read the **blog below** that talks about the influence of colonialism on what is seen as important and valuable: [Black Lives Matter. What next? - HS Consultancy](#)



Reflective questions:

- > What ideas does my organisation have about who is important and how people should live?
- > Where do these come from?
- > How do these translate into the accepted knowledge of my organisation?
- > How does this knowledge underpin the systems that my organisation has?
- > How does this knowledge translate into the practice of the organisation?
- > Who does this benefit?
- > Who does this disadvantage?
- > How can these norms of understanding be challenged?
- > How can we access other knowledge and experience?

You may find these thoughts from those who took part in the Change Project helpful:

'There is an issue of divide and rule, this is a political and cultural weapon that has been used for centuries.'

'Co-production and intersectionality can affect commissioning intentions - who is included and excluded. Working with grass roots organisations, with criss-crossing and interweaving voices, enables inclusivity and encourages allyship to bring together what we are going to do.'

Black Lives Matter. What next?

by [Hari Sewell](#) | Feb 15, 2022 | [News](#)

In June 2020 I wrote a blog in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. It is still available on this website.

The dust has settled. In some contexts, it's business as usual. In other contexts and organisations, conversations about racism continue. I am honoured to be part of many of these as a training provider and facilitator.

Conversations are a good starting point. They bring people in relation to each other and it underscores the fact that antiracism is a collective endeavour. However, no one can address racism by getting their understanding straight (imagine practising anti-poverty work by reading, listening to podcasts and watching YouTube videos!).

One of the outcomes of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 is that there is a lot more awareness of racism. Many manifestations of racism which had been invisible have become visible. These racisms were not invisible by chance. They were, and are 'invisibilized'. The pluralised racisms (see Steven Garner 2010) includes this invisibilizing; the colonial strategy to conceal the operation of oppression and the consequences of oppression.

Racism does manifest as discriminatory acts and these do need to be challenged and corrected. The increased signing-up to antiracism following George Floyd's murder is largely measured by being active in calling out racist actions. It is often addressed as location-specific, in institutions, sectors and even personal social networks such as families. There are serious limitations in this approach to antiracism. It's like trying to stem the climate crisis by wearing a facemask to reduce your carbon emissions, whilst carrying on with your life as normal.

Many people are not consciously aware of the extent to which whiteness as a racialised identity is equated with what is the most prestigious (e.g. fine dining, high end art, sartorial elegance). Skin tone that is closer to white is privileged around the world. Accents that are European are associated with sexiness in a way that is not replicated for accents of the global south. Whiteness as symbolic of the elite is seen in the perception by most people that white people are responsible for the knowledges that have enabled human progress globally. Finally, the unfamiliarity with talking about whiteness and even more so, from a critical perspective, captures the extent to which ideas about status and superiority are embedded in the notion of what denotes whiteness. Compare this with the ease with which so-called minorities are routinely spoken and written about in problematic terms. The fact that this positioning of whiteness is unacknowledged explicitly in mainstream discourses further embeds these beliefs into systems and institutions nationally and globally.

Historically, a big change occurred when the resources in the natural world were no longer considered to be available for use to meet needs (for food, shelter, clothing). The model that promotes and normalises a desire to acquire and accumulate by definition requires extraction and exploitation. Extraction, without due consideration of consequences and exploitation of people. In short, many people could not afford to acquire much more than they need without the planet and people being exploited in systems of production.

Antiracism activism must include decolonising. Contrary to a dominant narrative that we are in a post-colonial era we enact colonial models in our everyday lives. We use systems and models that are shaped by partial knowledge which normalises whiteness as the elite and by default, other racialised identities as inferior. We enjoy wealth in the global north because of historical and current extraction and exploitation from the global south.

We have been socialised to think of global inequality as 'AND' rather than 'BECAUSE'. "People in the global south are (unfortunately) poor AND we are richer and more developed".

What if we were educated and socialised to understand that people in the global south are made poor BECAUSE we in the global north wish to be richer? It may seem unfamiliar, challenging, naïve and a misrepresentation to some readers. This may be because these books are yet to be read:

Walter Rodney: How Europe under-developed Africa

Angela Saini Superior: The return of race science

Kehinde Andrews: The new age of empire

These are not easy books and the fact that they may provoke resistance at a visceral level is an example of the living colonial ideas we carry. It would not take more than a cursory reflection to realise that the food, fashion and fancy gadgets that we acquire could not cost what they do if we paid humans globally a decent wage and if we took care of the environment along the way. Indigenous author Tyson Yunkaporta in Sand Talk stated: "If you live a life without violence you are outsourcing your conflict to unseen powers and detonating it in areas beyond your living space. Most of the southern hemisphere is receiving that outsourced violence to supply what you need for the clean, technological, peaceful spaces of your existence" (2020, pg224).

Imaging for a moment that you were on a video call with a thousand people from the global south and were witnessing someone with relative wealth from the global north saying "I see your suffering so that I can be rich but I'm good with that". I imagine that for most people it would sound far from the empathetic modern inclusive society that we have been socialised to believe we live in. This is in fact what our behaviours say every day. It is not highly distinguishable from colonial thinking. Real progress on antiracism requires decolonising minds, institutions and systems which have a deeply embedded sense of the rightness of the way things are. This scale of transformation can only ever be achieved as a collective endeavour.

Sewell, H. (2022) Black Lives Matter. What Next. [Black Lives Matter. What next? - HS Consultancy](#)