

Dominant and nondominant dynamics Tim McNichol major author

Dominant Culture (DC) & Non-dominant Culture (NDC) Dynamics

I am grateful to Tim McNichol for his thoughtful description of DC/NDC dynamics and encounters he has observed in corporations and how women and non-whites speak from their experiences of same. Please do not use his material outside of WMFDP work without his express permission. Jo Ann

Please try to read this in the generic sense of the stories you hear from POC, women, etc.

GENERAL PATTERN

Differing world views cause minor rubs & misunderstandings that the NDC person is hesitant to bring up because they are not sure how it will be received by people in the DC (Dominant Culture).

After a period of time, with the small paper cuts starting to add up, the NDC person takes the chance to speak up. The DC (dominant culture) person tends to see the issues described as relatively minor in the grand scheme of things, and therefore often discounts or dismisses them and usually takes little to no action on them.

After a longer period of time, the paper cuts continue piling up for the NDC person and they voice more clearly and loudly their dissatisfaction. The DC person often sees this as the person changing' and becoming 'resistant' or 'negative.'

After the NDC is judged or picks up the label of being resistant or negative, they shut down voicing their issues because they see nothing to gain from it and only something to lose because all their comments are treated as "just more complaints."

There are almost always legitimate 'performance issues' (because all of us can always improve our performance) that get embroiled in all of the above. If unable to separate the performance from the cultural issues, the DC person groups all the issues as performance issues and feels justified in judging the person as unqualified, a poor performer, etc. Also, because of the lack of awareness of the cultural differences and the difficulty in communicating with the NDC person, the DC person does not always do a good job of giving feedback to the NDC person so that they can understand (or in some cases, even hear about) what the performance issues are.

The DC person easily finds other people in the DC who see things the way they do, so they "know" their assessment and interpretation of the situation is correct.

If the NDC person stays, they may find someone else (an ally) who really listens to them and sees how the cultural world-view conflicts are adding to and confusing the performance problems.

If the ally is from the DC, their speaking up is often experienced by other DC people as “breaking rank” or they are labeled as being “hood winked” or “poisoned” by the NDC person's negativity.

If the ally is another NDC person, they run the risk of being lumped in with the “problem person.” Either way, the ally has to then decide how much risk they are willing to take on to continue being a public ally.

Bottom line, the NDC person continues to feel unheard & disrespected and sooner or later chooses to leave the job (either physically or emotionally).

The DC person feels relieved that that trouble employee is gone and hopes that the next NDC works out better.

I think this is a pretty accurate summary of what people in the NDC describe, and I observe, about their experience in corporate America. And I would say it is a critical component of what we try to educate our clients about. **Tim McNichol**