

## **INCLUSIVE CLIMATE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES FROM MUSLIM DIASPORA IN THE WESTERN ORGANISATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This exploratory study focuses on the impact of inclusive organisational climate on the members of Muslim diaspora in the Western workforce. There are theories and evidence that view increasing diversity in the workforce as a positive rather than a negative phenomenon. This is one of the few research papers that exclusively focuses on the implications of inclusive management practices for Muslim employees in the Western organisations. Evidence from the Muslim employees working in different industrial sectors in Australia, New Zealand, United States, and Canada have been used to explore the positive outcomes of inclusive organisational climate propositioned by the growing Muslim community in the Western workplace. This exploratory qualitative study presents the findings from 30 interviews with purposively selected Muslim employees working in the Western economies. Recursive abstraction and thematic approach have been used to analyse the data. The findings supported the popular assumption that inclusive organisational environment positively influences the desired employee outcomes among the Muslim employees that may lead to the attainment of various organisational goals. The findings also revealed that Muslim workers in the Western workplace feel more comfortable and included in a work climate where co-workers from different backgrounds or orientation are interested and encouraged to discuss their faith, values, and practices openly instead of carefully avoiding such conversation in the social interaction. Inclusiveness, to the Western workers with Muslim identity, is more about the interaction and behaviour of their co-workers at a personal level and less about the organisational system level mechanisms. Social exchange*

*theory underpins the phenomenon explored in this study. Implications have been drawn for managers and human resource experts in the Western organisations.*

**Keywords:** Muslim diaspora, social exchange theory, inclusive environment, Western workplace, diversity management

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Muslim diaspora in the Western economy is a topic of social interest and yet remains a rarely explored subject in extant business literature. The unique representation of workers from different Muslim cultural origins in a sharply contrasting Western work setting deserves some special attention due to persisting challenges faced by this subculture with multiple identities, legal pluralism, cultural continuities (Afshar et al., 2005; Grillo, 2004), and so forth. Out of the total population of 7.3 billion in the world, Muslim population is around 1.8 billion (United Nations, 2015). Muslim community is not a single homogeneous group, rather they come from different socioeconomic stratum in the world. The heterogeneous group of Muslim population migrating to Western countries from different cultural origin constitutes Muslim diaspora in the Western workforce. The gravity of the so-called “Islamophobia” in the West has further extended the importance of focusing on the strategic advantages of inclusive management practices in the Western organisations.

This study examines the impact of inclusive management practices on the attitude and performance of members of Muslim diaspora working in the Western advanced economies. Evidence from the Muslim employees working in different industries in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada, and United States have been used to explore the positive organisational outcomes propositioned by the growing Muslim community in the Western workplace. The findings should help the management practitioners develop a different strategic perspective about the growing tension between increasing Islamophobia in the Western culture and the necessity of inclusion of the fast-growing Muslim population in the Western economy and workforce (Moghissi & Ghorashi, 2016).

This study is informed by a key research question: What inclusive management practices are perceived desirable and useful by members of the Muslim diaspora in the Western organisations and why? The study also aims to explore how inclusive climate may influence the attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of the Muslim employees in a Western work environment.

This paper is organised in six major sections. First, the social exchange theory has been explored as the theoretical foundation underpinning this study. Second, the concept of diaspora has been explored with a specific focus on Muslim diaspora to highlight the literature gap. Third, the concepts of diversity and benefits of inclusiveness have been discussed. Fourth, the methodology of the study has been explained. Fifth, the major findings from the interview schedule have been presented and discussed, and finally, a conclusion has been drawn with an implication for management practitioners and future researchers.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Social exchange theory underpins the interactive relationships between employees and the organisation (see Twenge et al., 2008; Kataria et al., 2013). According to social exchange theory, the goal of human behaviour in organisation is to maximise rewards and minimise costs. The foundation of social exchange theory is employee engagement (Yin, 2018). If employees believe that their work behaviour generates expected outcome that in turn motivates and engages them in the expected work behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2010). The reward, respect, justice, and resources offered by the organisation help create employees' trust toward their organisation and increase their job performance (Masterson & Taylor, 2000).

Social exchange theory can explain why an inclusive organisational climate may be reciprocated (or expected to be reciprocated) by the representatives of Muslim diaspora in the Western workforce by positive attitudes and behaviours. The three fundamental ideas of social exchange theory, i.e., expectations of reciprocity, resources exchanged, and relationship that emerge (Hom et al., 2009; Penrose, 1995; Shore & Barksdale, 1998) have also been used to predict and explain the reciprocity effect of return on inclusive management practices explored in this study. Social exchange theory is the theoretical foundation of this research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Concept of Muslim Diaspora**

The word "diaspora" has a Greek origin which means "scattering of seeds" or "dispersion." This word was widely used to refer to the dispersion or forced migration of Jews throughout the world (<http://www.answers.com/topic/diaspora>). Until the late 1960s, the concept of diaspora was exclusively applied to the historical cases, but new forms of diasporas came into existence with new waves

of migration, new technologies of communication, and the abandonment of strict integration policies by many nation-states. In recent years, the word diaspora has popularly been used to describe and analyse the political conversation of American Muslims. It means how American Muslims are constantly redefining their identity as a community in the United States, and at the same time, how they are readjusting to American society and the Islamic world (Schumann, 2007).

Safran (1991) defined diaspora as an expatriate minority community whose members share some common characteristics. His definition has some flexibility as he identified six characteristics and mentioned that a particular diaspora may contain several of those characteristics and not necessarily all of them. His definition views a diaspora as a unique group of people dispersed from their land of origin to two or more foreign regions and they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland. This group may feel partly alienated and insulated from the dominant host society and they continue to regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and the future home of their descendants. They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and they continue to relate to that homeland and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are crucially demarcated by the existence of such a relationship. In line with Safran's theory (1991), Shain and Barth (2003) have defined diaspora as people who reside, somewhat on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland. However, most scholars agreed that diasporas are not alike and their different histories, generations of exit, their cultures and trajectories mark them out as rather unique (Baser & Swain, 2008).

These definitions of "diaspora" indicate that the members of a diaspora may devotedly try to retain their originality by holding on to the root culture in its point of dispersion. This also implies that the diaspora will emerge as a unique segment trying to retain the memory or vision of their homeland, while their home of origin may have moved forward away from traditional culture of the homeland. Therefore, a diaspora tends to protest cultural assimilation to their host community while they fail to keep pace with the homeland culture. This should make this collection of individuals a unique social entity with an interesting set of perceptions and demands. These groups may be dispersed to different host countries with diverged socioeconomic and cultural context and yet hold a common platform of vision and myth of their original homeland and the dream of returning to their root when the situation there (origin) is changed in future.

All the characteristics of a diaspora may essentially apply to Muslim diaspora in the Western advanced economies with their unique set of religious, cultural,

ritualistic, and historical origins. Rahnema (2006) and Albrecht et al. (2016) identified “triple identity” (religious, original national, and new national) and Schumann (2007) highlighted on the “twofold” affiliation of Muslim population in West to explore the uniqueness of this subculture. Saint-Blancat (2002, p. 149) explained this intricacy as follows:

The affirmation of the diaspora is both an exercise in critical distancing and a reappropriation of a collective and individual self ... In the long term, everything depends on their desire and capacity to ensure the juxtaposition of the continuity of their descent with the imperative of change ... The difficulties are not born of the fluid, pragmatic management of space that is reflected in the variety of strategies for integration into different European societies. Rather, they are difficulties linked to the development of a flexible category of belonging, capable of taking into account plural dynamics of identity, still far from a religious communitarianism that might try to compensate for an incomplete sociability. Beyond the necessary institutional representation, the Muslim diaspora also needs, in order to be structured, a logic of inclusion that ensures its members of the mutual recognition of a legitimate right to be Muslim in several ways.

A complex sense of collectiveness based on religious identity despite the root scattering from different lands of origin makes the Muslim diaspora in the west even more interesting to study and rather challenging to include in the Western work culture.

### **Diversity and Inclusiveness: Benefits and Challenges**

Workplace inclusion and diversity are conceptualised differently in the business literature. Inclusion environment provides respect and equitable opportunities leading to organisational success (Panicker et al., 2018) where individuals feel like an important part of the organisation through equal and unbiased access to information and feel connected to co-workers and effectively engage in the decision-making process irrespective of their uniqueness (Mor Barak, 2011). Inclusive climate also ensures the full participation and contribution of employees in organisations through removing obstacles (Roberson, 2006). Inclusive practices make sure that all members of the organisation feel accepted and involved in the decision-making process, get equally treated in the conflict resolution strategies, and experience unbiased behaviour (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Nishii, 2010). By the same token, inclusive management refers to the word and action of the managers that invite and encourage contributions from a diverged group of employees (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Inclusive management practices

essentially have positive effects on majority team members through empowerment in the workplace (Pelled, 1996). The reasons of positive effect of such inclusive practices are the perceived autonomy, information sharing, and increased engagement among the members of the organisation. An inclusive climate can also ensure a better person-organisation match, reduced stress, involved decision making, and improved communication flow (Seibert et al., 2004; Maslach, 1999; Kezar, 2001; Butts et al., 2009).

An inclusive climate consists of policies, procedures, and actions of organisational agents that create unbiased climate and system for all social groups with especial attention to the underprivileged groups (Panicker et al., 2018). Inclusive climates embrace the unique qualities of all the members from various social groups (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009; Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998) and create an environment where individual employee feels comfortable to express their uniqueness and still be treated as an insider (Shore et al., 2011). Inclusive climate also requires the full and successful integration of a diverged group of people into a workplace or industry and a commitment to workplace diversity (Ball et al., 2005).

Although diversity and inclusiveness are two different concepts, the nature and extent of diversity in the workplace essentially changes the dynamics of the inclusive management practices and usually makes it more complex. Moreover, diversity has an impact on the business performance. To create a diverse workplace, managers need to be more capable of dealing with diversity within their organisation and also externally in the community which requires inclusive management capabilities.

Enhancing diversity is identified as one of the key factors that may help improve firms' performance. The minority friendly firms achieve significantly more return than the other firms according to extant literature. In their study, Bergen et al. (2005) focused on racial diversity more than the other kinds of diversity such as age, gender, and nationality. This study tried to find out the relationship between various forms of diversity and organisational performance. They found out that the companies are now creating racial, ethnic, and workforce balance not for the legal or ethical compliance but for the economic self-interest. Organisations need to hire people with necessary cultural and language skills to deal with local customers and finally earn more profit. Equal opportunities and fair treatment are found to be more important than demographic changes in contemporary business environment (Bergen et al., 2005).

Most of the organisations focus on traditional workforce diversity issues like designing a new product team, dealing with multilingual workforce, comparing

human resource practices in different countries, differences in accounting systems, security issues for global diversity, and so on. But the real situation is much more complex. The workforce across the world is more international. The new issues of diversity are outsourcing, migration, international legal constraints, and refugees. Diversity scholars have focused on diversity management initiatives or inclusive management practices to facilitate assimilation.

Diversified workforce is necessary for the organisation as it is related to long-term success of the organisation. It also creates the competitive advantages for the organisation. Employees and managers of the organisation need to learn and understand the workforce diversity so that they can get the advantages from it (Aghazadeh, 2004). Turnover intention may also be influenced by the diversity. Groeneveld (2011) found that diversity policies are used to measure the effects of diversity management on the turnover intention. This study could not find out the reasons behind turnover or retention of employees in the Dutch public sector firms though the study emphasised on the diversity policies to realise the full potential of the diverse workforce.

The inclusive management practices or diversity policies are usually not legally binding on private sector. However, a legal framework for managing diversity in federal agencies exists in most of the Western economies that are open to migration (Syed & Kramar, 2010). Despite existence of such legal frameworks, Australian model for diversity management does not manage minor ethnic workers properly. Syed and Kramar (2009) focused on the incapability of government and business for integrating multilevel perspective of managing workforce. In Australia, organisations face a limited number of obligations for managing workforce diversity. Organisations also face difficulty with ensuring equality in employment. In the private sector, diversity management represents a voluntary corporate strategy, which is considered to be closely linked, to increased productivity and performance (Bertone & Leahy, 2001; Coleman, 1995). According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Network of Australia survey (EEONA, 2005), diversity programs currently give higher priority to issues associated with harassment (91%), women (75%), caring responsibilities (69%), and disability (59%) than to issues such as religion (22%) and nationality (25%). Even in best practicing organisations, diversity management has a narrow focus, for example, prioritising women, harassment, caring responsibilities, and disability ahead of religion, nationality, and race. The survey suggests that the major barriers to implementation include a lack of recognition of the business benefits of diversity, a lack of accountability and commitment by senior managers, a general lack of awareness of diversity issues, and a lack of resources and effective tools for implementation.

Shen et al. (2009) found that there is a wide discrimination in employment. Women and members of minority groups get lesser chance of employment in higher organisational levels. These people are always disadvantaged in training, performance appraisal, and remuneration. Organisations recruit people from minority groups for lower positions and provide training of norms and values of the dominant organisational culture. There are some other problems like lack of pay parity. Employees from minority subculture cannot express their opinion. This study found that most of the companies do not have effective diversity management for implementing equal employment opportunity (EEO) and affirmative action (AA) to get advantages from diverse workforce.

Moreover, ineffective diversity management also creates some problems like conflict, demotivation, higher employee turnover, and lower organisational performance. Muslim diaspora could be found especially challenging in the Western work context. A contextual approach to diversity considers the internal heterogeneity of Muslim diaspora and their traditions and sensitivities. A recent study found that Muslim diasporas in the United States face a problem with their own identification and also to integrate into global workforce and hence the recent issues on workforce diversity need to be considered (Mir, 2013).

Human resource department plays an important role in creating an inclusive organisational climate through its policies and practices. Welbourne et al. (2017) suggested facilitating employee resource groups (ERG) to create spaces where employees can be around others who share similar social groups/characteristics. Jansen et al. (2015) argued that “multicultural” practices tend to be more effective in making minority group members feel included whereas the so-called “colour-blind” practices usually favour the majority or dominant culture in the work community. Shen et al. (2009) contended that through human resource management policies and practices, organisations can focus on EEO and AA, value diversity and utilise the knowledge and skills of a diverse workforce. In addition to this, flexible work arrangement (FWA) is a mean to enhance the organisational diversity and create inclusive work climate. Elisabeth et al. (2013) found the barriers to diversity enhancement through FWA. Organisational values regarding business pressure, client’s obligatory, and long working hours create constraint in implementing the FWA and finally limit the diversity management practices.

### **Importance of the Global Muslim Market**

The global Muslim market provides huge opportunities for the West and also for the Muslim countries. One of the important demographic factors is that those Muslim consumers are largely young and emerging middle class (Hatia & Temporal,



2012) that accounts for considerable consumption by Muslim market segment. Many multinational companies are already attracted to the Muslim market such as Nestle. Many of Nestle brands are offering halal (religiously permitted) products. In 2008, Nestle achieved US\$5.2 billion revenue only from halal products (Hatia & Temporal, 2012). There are some food chains like Nandos, Burger King, and Subway that are offering halal products in the outlets. Moreover, the demand for halal food in Europe is US\$67 billion in 2010. The global halal market is valued at around US\$2.3 trillion and worldwide halal food market is US\$650 billion, and that is 17% of the global food industry (Hatia & Temporal, 2012).

Muslim consumer market is the new niche for the United States companies. American Muslims want to get more acknowledgements in the marketplace. Nestle has about 20 factories in Europe with halal products. In the United States, McDonald's is already popular for its halal menu (Zoll, 2010). McDonald's has three times more customers in the Arab world. Microsoft has created an Egyptian outsourcing business which employed 65,000 people and generates more revenue. Another company, Best Buy Inc., is participating in a national advertisement through acknowledging a Muslim holiday-like Eid-ul-Azha or the fast of the sacrifice (Zoll, 2010). The concept of halal represents the daily application of Islamic law that is applied to food, drink, apparel hygiene products, nutritional supplements, and financial instruments. It is also applied to the business ethics, management styles, human resource policies, and manufacturing and production methods (Hatia & Temporal, 2012).

Multinational companies based in the United States often balance some competing interests while doing business in Muslim countries. They need to comply with the local law and try to balance between local customs and company's culture. American companies need to accommodate Muslim religious practices at work in Muslim countries. For example, in case of religious holidays, they should make some arrangements that do not affect the entire workplace. On the other hand, career opportunity for women is limited in the Muslim world. Many women can play an important role as an expatriate in the business world. In Saudi Arabia, women should wear dress like over garment in the public place and sometimes on the job. It is one of the cultural norms in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, multinational companies need to consider these issues. On the other hand, in Yemen women are seen in business and they are considered more committed to their work than the male employees (Bloomberg Finance LP, 2010).

In the Muslim world, the United States companies need to consider other factors such as cash reserves, tax structure, and market size (Mutsikiwa & Basera, 2012). Otherwise, the United States companies will be confronted with cultural

misunderstanding. Cultural aspects represent the real challenges for the companies. Some factors need to be considered like power, community, rules, communication, and Islamic finance for achieving these challenges. A study (Mutsikiwa & Basera, 2012) on consumers' perception tried to find out whether consumers' perception of halal food products is influenced by the sociocultural factors or not. These sociocultural factors are education, religion, occupation, and social stratification. The study found that education and wealth of individuals do not significantly influence the consumption of halal food, whereas religion has significant impact on the consumption of halal food and therefore a clear insight into the Muslim market is vital for the international businesses.

### **Research Gap**

Despite the importance of religion-based marketing and widely accepted significance of Muslim market in business literature, a research gap prevails in exploring the strategic advantages offered by the presence of Muslim diaspora in the Western workforce. Western literature on Muslim diaspora has predominantly focused on the social aspects or challenges of Muslim presence in Western workforce. Only a few research papers have remotely touched base with the unique aspects and advantage of including Muslim staff members in a Western organisation. Therefore, a significant research gap is visible in understanding the uniqueness of Muslim diaspora in the Western advance economy to plan an effective set of inclusive management practices to avail the full benefits of such programs.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This exploratory qualitative study uses the findings from 30 interviews with purposively selected Muslim migrant employees from the South Asian origin currently employed in Western advanced economies such as Australia, New Zealand, United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. The key criteria for purposive selection required the respondents to: (1) hold a Muslim identity (the respondents must formally identify themselves as believers of Islamic faith to ensure that Muslim identity is reasonably central to their value system), (2) be working in an English-speaking Western country (for convenience of interpretation), (3) be working in a Western industry for at least five years to develop an understanding of inclusive practices, and (4) be working in a Western industry that is not predominantly employing Muslim workers for obvious strategic advantage (e.g., halal industry). This criterion was used to better observe and understand the perception of Muslim diaspora about inclusiveness practices in a diverged Western work community.

The respondents were initially recruited through the researchers' social network and then extended through snowballing.

Data has been collected via Skype and telephone interview using semi-structured interview schedule until the saturation point is reached (when no new information was emerging from the interviews). The responses have been transcribed and verified through email communication. The composition of the sample and the reasons behind their (or their ancestor's) migration is summarised in Table 1. Recursive abstraction and thematic approach have been used to analyse the qualitative data.

Table 1  
*Sample composition (N = 30)*

| Respondents               | Australia | Canada | UK | USA | NZ |
|---------------------------|-----------|--------|----|-----|----|
| Number of respondents     | 12        | 2      | 7  | 8   | 1  |
| 1st generation immigrants | 12        | 2      | 7  | 7   | 1  |
| 2nd generation            | –         | –      | –  | –   | –  |
| Male                      | 6         | 2      | 6  | 6   | 1  |
| Female                    | 6         | –      | 1  | 2   | 0  |

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **The Sample Composition and Relevant Personal Information of the Respondents**

Out of the 30 respondents, majority lives in Australia, United States, and United Kingdom. More than two-third of the respondents are male. The respondents are predominantly first-generation immigrants that travelled to the host country as a student and for a better life or as a spouse. More than two-third of the migrants are working in their core area of expertise in different sectors such as higher education, financial sector, customer services, IT sector, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and mining industry. About one-third of the respondents are working away from their core area of expertise. This information is detailed in Table 2 along with their reference identification (ID) or labels. These IDs have been used in the discussion against their respective statements.

Table 2  
*Relevant personal information against the reference ID of the participants*

| ID  | First generation of migrants                                       | Reasons for migration  | Reasons for ancestor's migration | Working in core area of expertise | Sector                        |
|-----|--|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| R1  | Yes  | Study, better social security, better education for children                         | N/A                              | No                                | Customer assistant            |
| R2  | Yes. Came to Australia as a student with the vision to settle down | Better job opportunities   | N/A                              | No                                | Insurance company             |
| R3  | Yes  | Pursue higher studies, better education system for the children                      | N/A                              | Yes                               | Education                     |
| R4  | Yes  | Education  | N/A                              | Yes                               | Education                     |
| R5  | Yes  | Better education for children, social security, and lifestyle                        | N/A                              | No                                | Pharmaceutical company        |
| R6  | Yes  | Education  | N/A                              | No                                | Service organisation          |
| R7  | Yes. Migrated to USA for higher education                          | Higher education   | N/A                              | Yes                               | Telecom sector                |
| R8  | Yes  | Migrated after getting married   | N/A                              | No                                | Customer service organisation |
| R9  | Yes  | Education and better secured life  | N/A                              | Yes                               | Service organisation          |
| R10 | No, third generation   | N/A  | Better opportunity for children  | No                                | IT sector                     |
| R11 | Yes  | To get more work opportunity. To make my family the opportunity for higher education | N/A                              | Yes                               | IT sector                     |

*(continued on next page)*

Table 2: (continued)

| ID  | First generation of migrants          | Reasons for migration  | Reasons for ancestor's migration   | Working in core area of expertise | Sector                     |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| R12 | Yes                                   | For higher education   | N/A  | Yes                               | Education                  |
| R13 | Yes                                   | Wanted to do higher studies in the USA   | N/A  | Yes                               | Manufacturing organisation |
| R14 | Yes. Because I wasn't born in the USA | For better opportunities in education and for a better lifestyle   | Parents and grandparents wanted the next generation to have better opportunity | No                                | Financial sector           |
| R15 | Yes                                   | Got married to an Australian citizen and migrated for family   | N/A  | –                                 | Service organisation       |
| R16 | Yes                                   | Study  | N/A  | Yes                               | Education                  |
| R17 | Yes                                   | Avoid terrible traffic, security, better life and education for my child, global exposure  | N/A  | Yes                               | Service organisation       |
| R18 | Yes                                   | For better future, higher education, better career   | N/A  | Yes                               | Financial institution      |
| R19 | Yes                                   | Got married to a Bangladeshi-born Australian who has lots of relatives living in Australia for more than a decade. That's why had no objection in deciding to get married with a person living in Australia. | N/A  | No                                | Banking                    |

*(continued on next page)*

Table 2: (continued)

| ID  | First generation of migrants | Reasons for migration   | Reasons for ancestor's migration | Working in core area of expertise | Sector               |
|-----|------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| R20 | Yes                          | As a spouse   | N/A                              | Yes                               | Service organisation |
| R21 | Yes. I moved to USA in 2008  | Initially, moved to USA for higher education and secondly for business purpose  | N/A                              | Yes                               | Marketing            |
| R22 | Yes                          | Higher education  | N/A                              | Yes                               | Education            |
| R23 | Yes                          | To pursue higher study and jobs   | N/A                              | Yes                               | Electrical company   |
| R24 | Yes                          | To pursue higher study and jobs   | N/A                              | Yes                               | Higher education     |
| R25 | Yes                          | To pursue higher study and jobs   | N/A                              | Yes                               | Higher education     |
| R26 | Yes                          | To pursue higher study and jobs   | N/A                              | Yes                               | Higher education     |
| R27 | Yes                          | To pursue higher study and jobs   | N/A                              | Yes                               | Higher education     |
| R28 | Yes                          | To pursue higher study and jobs   | N/A                              | Yes                               | Higher education     |
| R29 | Yes                          | To pursue higher study and jobs   | N/A                              | Yes                               | IT                   |
| R30 | Yes                          | To pursue higher study and jobs and find a third country to live in away from any of the spouse's country of origin (the spouses came from two different countries) | N/A                              | Yes                               | Mining industry      |

## **Nature of Inclusive Management Practices Experienced by the Muslim Employees**

Ten out of thirty respondents experienced discriminations in their Western workplace due to the religious identity as opposed to 12 that experienced no discrimination. The rest of the participants were not sure if they have faced discrimination. Some of the noteworthy comments (presented below) will help describe the nature and extent of both positive and negative discrimination faced by the members of Muslim diaspora in the Western organisations. These comments will also help identify the preferred treatments in the workplace that Muslim employees consider to be inclusive management practices that may lead to positive employee outcomes.

Everyone treats me the same way they treat others, but they make sure that I am aware of any food that contains pork (R-2).

It becomes very hard to find time and space to pray during office hours. As Muslims are non-alcoholic, so it creates some dilemmas in official parties. Whether to attend or not, what to eat-some haram food like pork is also available, what to wear in office especially for women, whether to celebrate non-Islamic events like Halloween, Black Friday, and others (R-17).

Some identified respectful interest in Islamic customs to be indicative of inclusive climate. For example, R-14 stated, “I sometimes get asked about religion and like talking about my religion to the people who seemed interested in knowing about Islam.”

An interesting view has been offered by R-19: “There are discriminations in the workplace due to religious identity, but I have not faced this in the workplace. Actually, it depends on how skilled a person is. A highly skilled person faces little or no discrimination. Some companies are very strict on any kind of employee discrimination.” He implied that the presence, nature, and intensity of perceived and/or actual discrimination depends largely on the skills and abilities of the Muslim worker as well as the strictness or leniency of the company policy against discriminations.

One of the respondents from higher education sector appreciated his university’s inclusive climate. He stated:

In my workplace it is the rule to respect everyone irrespective of gender, culture, religion, or language differences. Hence, the attitude towards international student is very positive. The university has arranged separate prayer rooms and associate facilities for Muslims and for other religions as well. Cafeterias have halal options (R-22).

About eight participants stated that they have faced some issues in their workplace. However, they are not sure if they should brand it as Islamophobia or religious discrimination or lack of inclusiveness. For example, R-9 stated, “To get promotion in the company where I am working it took eight years. I wonder why after having very good recommendations from colleagues, there is a delay in case of promotion.”

When the respondents were asked if they are expected to behave in a certain way due to their cultural or religious identity (stereotypes), 22 out of 30 respondents said they did not feel such vibe in their climate. They stated that others usually understand if the Muslim workers want to take leave to celebrate religious festivals. The others could not particularly specify any stereotype about Muslim community in the workplace although they sense a negative vibe in the climate. A few said Islamophobia or stereotype against Muslim community is a worldwide phenomenon rather than an organisational issue. Respondents R-8 and R-19 sensed this general negativity against members from Muslim diaspora in their respective workplaces. R-19 stated, “It exists in all Western countries. They have created this phobia to dominate other countries.”

When the respondents were asked if they faced social isolation due to their cultural identity from their work team, 23 out of 30 claimed not to have experienced any such social isolation. R-2 said, “We go for different activities like bowling or to a pub for team building and they do not mind if I don’t drink.” R-8 said, “If I go to after hour hangout, I don’t drink alcohol, that’s ok with my colleagues.”

Some other statements in line with this thought are as follows:

I often get asked to meet after work to hang out together with my co-workers and I joined my co-workers in after work activities sometimes. I never felt that I was being left out because of my cultural or religious background (R-14).

I meant every culture is different, if you are a core religious person, you will not get along with other cultural people. As I am open to any other culture, I get along with the other culture (R-21).



This last statement implies that discriminative or non-inclusive practices in workplace may be reciprocal to the behaviour and attitude of the recipient of discrimination. The lack of openness of a Muslim employee towards the dominant culture in the work community may elicit exclusion and eventually contribute to creating a non-inclusive work climate and vice versa.

### **Impact of Inclusive Management Practices on the Behaviour of the Muslim Workers**

A total of 17 out of 30 respondents said that they do not necessarily feel more comfortable being a part of any specific subculture, i.e., Muslim diasporic community in workplace or their home country community. These 17 respondents belong to the segment of respondents who do not feel any stereotypes or negative discriminations in the work community due to their religious identity. They are also the ones who predominantly believes that discrimination is reciprocal, i.e., the attitude and behaviour of the target of discrimination may stimulate non-inclusive climate. One of these respondents stated, “My workplace is multicultural and there are people of various backgrounds and as long as a person is friendly, I feel comfortable” (R-2).

Therefore, it is safe to propose that the perceived inclusive climate may be reciprocated by positive attitude and behaviour among the members of Muslim diaspora in workplace. By the same token, the Muslim employees’ positive attitude towards the dominant culture may reinforce non-discriminatory practices and shape a strong inclusive organisational culture.

Only 2 out of 30 respondents said they feel more comfortable within a certain subculture in the workplace. For example, R-8 said, “Yes, I am more comfortable with my sub-continental colleagues, such as Indian, Bangladeshi, Srilankan, and Pakistani.” Respondent R-11 stated:

I’m connected with Muslim Community Association in California. I can do my regular prayer there. They provide every facility a Muslim can have, like woman’s education, child education, gym for men and women, halal food and free iftar (breakfast during religious fasting month) for all. They also provide scholarship to students.

Although R-11 was referring to a community in a social context outside the workplace, she would feel more comfortable in a similar community in her workplace which supports Welbourne et al.’s (2017) case for designing employee resource groups for the subcultures in the organisations.

The others felt like there is no other subculture formed in their workplace to belong to. They see the workplace as a professional community and there is no question of feeling comfortable with someone based on religious identity. R-13 said, “My relationship with my co-workers is strictly professional, and I don’t feel that my cultural or religious background would have any influence on my job performance.” Another participant claimed, “I often get inquisitive inquiries from different people about my cultural or religious background. I like letting people know about my birthplace or my religion and educate people about Islam” (R-14). R-16 said there is no strong subculture in his workplace. Respondent R-22 believes, “the comfortable level depends on a person’s behaviour. It is not related to cultural perspective.” This group of respondents also predominantly perceives their work climate as inclusive and seem to have reciprocated that climate in their attitude and behaviour.

### **Muslim Employees’ Perspective on the Strategic Advantage of Inclusive Climate in the Western Workplace**

The respondents stated some positive strategic outcomes of inclusive climate experienced in their organisations in terms of (1) enhanced cultural intelligence and competitive advantage from diversity and inclusiveness in the work community, (2) ethical and legal compliance, (3) improved service quality, and (4) future expansion of business and market.

Most respondents believe that diversified workforce can generate more innovative ideas and Muslim diaspora help ensure the diversity in the workforce. One of the respondents said:

It is a competitive advantage for an organisation. If it is more diversified, then it can incorporate many ideas or talents. I feel that, in some aspect, businesses in Bangladesh now have more network in Western immigrant-based countries as many Muslim Bangladeshis are living in those states. So, they can reach many Western organisations through their countryman if they want (R-17).

Another respondent said, “My inclusion from Bangladeshi background may have increased diversity within the academic staff members” (R-3).

Diversified employees are one of the important sources of competitive advantages. Respondent R-17 stated, “Immigrant population is the driving force in Canada’s economy. An organisation should be diversified into cultural/religious identity or

country of origin. Because of diversified employees is the competitive advantage for an organisation through incorporating many ideas/talents.”

An organisation can demonstrate superior ethical practices by including members from minority subcultures. This practice is viewed by a few respondents as a legal or moral obligation. One of the respondents stated, “I feel they may have a moral obligation to have a certain number of employees of different backgrounds” (R-2).

Another respondent viewed the inclusion of Muslim members in workforce as a positive step towards upgrading the ethical standards in the work community. He said:

I think a Muslim person holds strong ethics at work which can help the workforce. It will also build trust in Western community that all Muslim people are not conservative or extremist. It will help to keep peace and make a bond between the non-Muslims and Muslims (R-21).

Another respondent said:

I feel that if the organisation is connected with Western workforce, they can encourage anti-racism practice. That means a company should be free from any religious restriction, and it should not distinguish employee based on their race, sex, or other non-work-related criteria. An individual can practice Islam while working with any Western workforce. People of our (Bangladeshi) country of origin will attract more people with this philosophy (R-11).

Another respondent stated:

My belief is that those from culturally different backgrounds can be used together to show that religious or cultural differences can be put aside and living or working peacefully together can be possible while letting those of different faiths to practice whatever they like in their private times (R-10).

All these statements indicate the benefits of increasing diversity in workplace from a moral or legal point of view which benefits the organisation by ensuring sustainable development. Moreover, different cultural backgrounds can foster better communication in case of customer services. A respondent said:

Australia is a multicultural country. People come from more than 200 countries. My cultural background helps my company to look after

its clients. In the same way, Muslim countries get lots of information regarding foreign culture, economy, and politics from the people living overseas and can plan its business expansion to foreign markets (R-19).

This was an example of how the cultural orientation and understanding of a predominantly Muslim country can help improve the current and future performance of the Western organisation and create future scope for international businesses. Similarly, R-23 stated:

It has been said that a company or organisation can be benefitted from a person for his/her independent sharing of knowledge and contributing experience, although he/she is from different culture/religious background/identity. My organisation has the opportunity to utilise the benefits of my presence and skills to enrich or compete with the other companies for expanding business/market.

Another respondent said, “I am leading the antibacterial drug discovery initiative at my university. My understanding of Muslim culture adds value to the development and future commercialisation of the drug” (R-3). These are all essentially reflections on how Muslim cultural orientations may better serve the Western organisations to expand market in predominantly Muslim countries by considering the Islamic values to better sell their product and also by creating new relationships and network based on mutual respect and understanding.

Moreover, “Muslim diasporas help to increase diversification and inclusion at workplace, grow deeper understanding of Muslim culture, and apply the knowledge to expand business globally” (R-7). Some other similar responses are presented below:

No direct advantage, but indirectly when I speak to Indian or Bangladeshi Muslim customer, I try to build a rapport based on our cultural identity, it does work sometimes (R-8).

During a specified time period, my university arranges a voice survey for ensuring cross cultural, open communication, accountability, and respect. Being a part of this one will help the organisation in workforce planning and development (R-22).

Respondent R-7 sums it up by stating:

In a country like Canada where the immigrant populations are the driving force of economy, an organisation should be diverse in employee cultural/religious identity/country of origin. It's a competitive advantage

for an organisation if it's more diversified that's how it can incorporate many ideas/talents from across the globe.

Muslim community may pave the future business and market expansion opportunities for the businesses in Muslim countries as well for mutual benefits. R-6 stated:

I know that lots of businessmen and business minded people migrated to Canada. Since they are living in Canada, they certainly have easy access and clear idea on local Canadian business market. I feel that Bangladesh can take advantage to expand their business in Canada by using these people.

Such interaction can help develop a global network that holds immeasurable future opportunities for international business and supply chain management.

Twelve out of thirty employees stated that their organisation can use their presence as an opportunity to expand business/market or as a core competence. The following comments best reflect their answers:

Sometimes when I speak with a Muslim customer, mainly from the Middle East, they feel happier and more comfortable speaking with me, so in that aspect I would say they can relate to the organisation (R-2).

Yes. Predominantly I am working in an area rich in Asian and Muslim people. This of course gives an added advantage to me and to my organisation due to the understanding of their religious boundaries and special requirements (R-5).

I can utilise my knowledge of the behavioural patterns of my ethnicity (the respondent was referring to Muslim background) to tailor customised products. They definitely use my (Muslim) background to explore more commercial work (R-9).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In line with the business and organisational diversity and inclusiveness literature (Butts et al., 2009; Hatia & Temporal, 2012), our evidence suggests that multifaceted strategic advantages are offered by the inclusion of Muslim diaspora in the Western organisations. These include the successful incorporation of the appropriate facilities or options to attract and satisfactorily serve the growing Muslim clients,

enhancement of cultural intelligence and cohesion within the diverse workforce, and possibility of expansion of business to the Muslim countries.

Our results also offer a better insight into the effective inclusive management practices for Muslim members of an organisation that are increasingly perceived as complex and challenging in the Western advanced economy. For example, our respondents mentioned that (1) confusing and limited food choices (halal options) in the office parties for the Muslim workers, (2) conflicting schedule with their prayer times, (3) official dress code contrary to Islamic modesty requirements (especially in case of female respondents), and (4) subtle reflection of deep rooted cultural stereotypes and stigma against Muslim community transmitted from the broader society may at times reflect negatively on an otherwise inclusive workplace. Some respondents emphasised on the invisible exclusion of Muslim workers evidenced by slow promotions or higher inclusion in technical positions as opposed to the leadership or strategic decision-making roles. Many of these issues can be resolved by adapting the inclusive human resource management practices and policies as suggested by Shen et al. (2009), i.e., focusing on EEO and AA, value diversity, by utilising the knowledge and skills of a diverse workforce and FWA as recommended by Elisabeth et al. (2013) to increase diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace.

In line with social exchange theory, some respondents viewed inclusive climate as an outcome of reciprocal inclusive interaction between the organisation and Muslim employees. They emphasised on an increased and effective communication and social exchange across subcultures and with the dominant culture in the organisation. Contrary to the popular believe, our respondents expressed their willingness to share and explain their religious values and practices to their colleague for a better understanding of each other. They also feel more welcome and included in a team if their colleagues or manager show interest in understanding their religious values and rituals which in turn has positive effects on their level of commitment, engagement, and sense of empowerment in the work community.

This finding is particularly interesting because it also extends the scope of social exchange theory beyond the popular exchange or reciprocity between organisation and employees. The extant diversity, equity, and inclusiveness literature predominantly focus on a one directional perspective of inclusive climate where organisation create provisions and system for inclusiveness and employees reciprocate through loyalty and performance. Our findings reveal the significance of a bidirectional exchange between employees from different religious or cultural background that has rarely been explored in diversity and inclusiveness studies. Our respondents reported a more enhanced feeling of inclusion when their co-workers

took interest in discussing their faith, religious practices, and cultural values rather than carefully avoiding such interaction to manage discrimination. The managers may be trained to initiate such respectful conversations and interactions to create a more inclusive climate.

Our findings do not negate the validity or advantage of designing employee resource groups as suggested by Welbourne et al. (2017). We rather suggest an additional inclusiveness strategy for a Western organisation where such homogenous subculture resource groups cannot be formed due to some structural or systemic constraints such as limited number of representatives from a certain homogenous group in proximate location or work group. We argue for designing appropriate provisions for the subculture resource groups while making sure that it remains optional to the employees from a subculture to avail such opportunities. Such options must not be an imposition on employees from a subculture even when they prefer not to avail such opportunity. A regular survey among the minority subcultures may indicate the preferred course of inclusiveness in an organisation. In some cases, a Muslim employee may seek a subculture resource group and space in a broader community setting rather than within the work community or organisation. Our findings also support the use of the “multicultural” (i.e., colourful) approach to inclusiveness as suggested by Jansen et al. (2016) as opposed to using the so-called colour-blind approach that predominantly favours the dominant culture in the workforce. However, multiculturalism should not be designed to exclude the other subcultures or dominant culture of the work community in this process because such climate is not likely to enhance the feeling of inclusiveness amongst the members of the Muslim diaspora in the Western organisations.

Due to considerable existing stereotypes against Muslim community in the Western culture, it seems important to address the rarely explored issue of how to create an inclusive climate to effectively avail the full benefits from including Muslim members in the Western workforce. Social exchange theory focuses on the interactive relationships between employees and the organisation which is strengthened by employee trust. Trust is built on the perceived benefits from reward, respect, justice, and resources offered by the organisation that are essentially the key components of inclusive practices. Respondents emphasised on the invisible indicators of non-inclusive climates such as slow promotion, less representation of Muslim employees in leadership positions, limited choices of Muslim meals in office parties, conflicting schedule with prayer times to have an impact on their job satisfaction, trust, and commitment to the organisation. Some viewed open interaction about religious values and celebration of all religious festivals as inclusive management practices that leads to higher job satisfaction and performance. Others viewed inclusive climate as the outcome of reciprocal

attitude and social exchange between Muslim and non-Muslim subculture within the organisation. Managers should be trained to better facilitate such exchange and organisations should look for ways to remove apparently invisible obstacles to ensure deserving promotion of members from the minority subcultures. This novel perspective of utilising cultural knowledge and presence of Muslim diaspora as one of the strategic advantages of a Western organisation may especially help managers of multinational organisations to conceptualise new ways of internationalisation that are mutually beneficial to both home and host countries.

More number of respondents from different countries of origin would further enrich the study. The future researchers may conduct quantitative research among the members of Muslim diaspora in the Western workforce that will confirm a statistically significant positive link between inclusive management practices and attitude and behaviour of employees from different Muslim cultural origin. Future researchers may also compare the variation of such relationship across Muslim diaspora from different origins moderated by relevant characteristics such as gender, age, language skills, and generation of migrants.

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