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**Cultural Issues**

**Introduction**

Supervision is aimed at helping employees to achieve organizational goals. The rise of multiculturalism in the workplace has become reality with supervisors now expected to incorporate different cultures in their work. They are to learn the cultures of different ethnic and religious groups to ensure that they are managed in a way that maximizes their productivity. All employees require to be treated like individuals whose behaviors are dependent on the cultural groups they belong. Supervisors should allow individuals to express their thoughts freely, receive empathetic responses and given an opportunity to correct their inappropriate behaviors (Henderson & Long, 2016). When an understanding is finally achieved, employees are treated with respect and dignity. However, when that does not happen, the culturally different employees face a great risk of being demoted or laid off. In most cases, employees belonging to the minority group status often view their majority counterparts with great suspicion. Hence, supervisors and managers are challenged to demonstrate that they are fair to everyone. Fairness is only achieved by action rather than talking. Admittedly, issues touching on race and ethnicity often make supervisors and their subordinates overact (Henderson & Long, 2016). It is the duty of supervisors and managers to help such culturally different employees to adapt and be accepted. The support is realized by first understanding their personal values and cultural norms. Secondly, the supervisors should adapt their communication by using phrases and words that the minority groups understand (Henderson & Long, 2016).

Muslims are one of the minority groups in the United States despite Islam being the second most popular religion in the world. Similar to other religions, Muslims have their distinct religious and cultural beliefs that they strictly adhere to. Organizations have had to make adjustments to accommodate Muslims and their beliefs. For example, Muslims pray five times a day. As a result, organizations have not only set aside time for such prayers but also special rooms where prayers can be conducted. Managers and supervisors are also required to learn other norms and beliefs of Muslims to ensure that they do not feel offended in their interactions with their superiors. The research study explores widely what managers need to know about Islam with an aim of supervising individual Muslims. It seeks to provide information on the unique beliefs and norms of Muslims that should be learnt by any manager and supervisor. Issues of communication, group dynamics, and culture among others are addressed and how best they can be used to supervise Muslims.

**Working in groups (Group Dynamics)**

Group collaboration is not an accident. Senior executives should plan and support teams in their organizations for them to be successful (Henderson & Long, 2016). Work is a group activity that involves sharing ideas and supporting one another to accomplish a certain task. Muslims are encouraged to make decisions through mutual consultation of all group members. Individualism is not encouraged by the religion. The Qur’an has different versus that address the importance of being in groups. In order to forbid evil and enjoin what is good, a person needs to be in a group so that duties can be satisfactorily performed. It is common knowledge that Prophet Muhammad valued groups and consulted his closest companions and also his wiser wives during periods of uncertainty. Islam values both working and living together in groups. Working in groups according to Islam yields better and effective results. Additionally, Islam claims that living alone is next to impossible and it is always advisable to live in groups. Working together in groups is valued by Islam to the extent that basic foundational pillars of Islam such as *Hajj,* *Salah*, *zakat* and *Sawn* are performed in a community (Hughes, 2013). Working in groups has various benefits such as learning from others, accomplishing tasks faster, generating better ideas and helps in the use of strengths, skills and knowledge possessed by others. *Salah*is a form of worship that exhibits groups’ dynamics five times a day. It is integral in the development of collective strength and generates and consolidates social cohesiveness.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

Interpersonal relationships are important for the productivity of any group (Gesteland, 2013). Elton Mayo in his experiments revealed that interpersonal relationships were one of the most important elements in building success in a group (Henderson & Long, 2016). Interpersonal relationship is defined as building rapport with individuals who have similar interests and goals. Interpersonal relationships allow for the development of a special bond among co-workers and also with supervisors. Furthermore, it allows for more effective communication and better understanding of employees (Gesteland, 2013). Islam has its prescribed standards of interpersonal relations as well as laid down codes of conduct. Honesty is one quality that must be present for interpersonal relationships to exist. Interpersonal relationships according to Muslims should be free of insincerity. A person should always work towards the welfare and good of others. One should not harm another and all efforts should be directed towards the benefit of others. Sacrifice is the other quality that involves foregoing one’s interests for the benefit of others. Those who sacrifice for others in Islam are promised immense reward. The spirit of sacrifice should be seen in one’s needs and also on matters related to temperament and comfort (Hughes, 2013). Justice, which is having moderation and striking a balance in interpersonal relationships as well as granting everyone his/her dues is another ingredient of interpersonal relationships among Muslims. Justice further demands that one’s economic, legal, religious, social, moral and cultural rights must be granted to a person with all honesty. Mercy (*rahmah*) are tender feelings and emotions that must also be observed in interpersonal relationships (Hughes, 2013). One is expected to show utmost love, kindness and affection towards another person. Forgiveness is also the other ingredient to building successful interpersonal relationship with Muslims.

As a supervisor, building interpersonal relationships with Muslims is quite tasking. Islam demands that interpersonal relationships are not only based on mere words but also action. Thus, a supervisor should ensure that he/she has all the qualities to develop interpersonal relationships with Muslim. Falling short of any of the values would lead to mistrust and breakdown in relationships. Interpersonal relationships play a major role in supervision (Gesteland, 2013). The supervisor can easily assign duties and have trust on the employees that they will be accomplished within the time given (Gesteland, 2013). Furthermore, conflict can easily be identified and be resolved among members.

**Communication**

Communication is integral to the success of any organization and the management should ensure that measures are put in place to ensure information can easily flow among stakeholders (Gesteland, 2013). Communication should flow from employees to the senior executives and also from the senior executives to the employees. Hence, the supervisor should have proper communication skills to facilitate the transfer of information. Importantly, the supervisor should be aware of the communication differences among diverse religious groups (Gesteland, 2013). When addressing members of the Islam faith, the supervisor should smile. Smiling is a way of starting any conversation in Islam and removing any form of past ill feelings. Furthermore, smiling while giving employees instructions brings joy both to the receiver and the giver. The supervisor should also be aware of the tone and volume of his/her voice. The tone determines whether or not one will form a relationship or break it. Undesirable loudness towards Muslims could put them off to the extent that further communication could become futile. Before starting any form of conversation, the supervisor should begin with an Islamic greeting of peace. The peace greeting repels hatred and creates love among people. In most cases, the greeting of peace is often accompanied by shaking hands. However, this occurs only if a person is greeting someone of the same gender.

Once hands have been shaken or the peace greeting has been exchanged, it is appropriate to ask about a person. Specifically, it is advisable to ask how they are doing, their well-being and health of their friends and family. Asking someone about their well-being makes them feel cared for and loved. As a result, communication between them is likely to be efficient and effective (Gesteland, 2013). Importantly, the supervisor should avoid the common sins of the tongue. In most cases, people make mistakes when dealing with Muslims such as cursing, slandering, insulting and lying. The choice of words during communication should be concise and simple such that Muslims can easily understand the supervisor when relaying information. Once the supervisor is done informing the employees, he/she should shake hands while smiling and greet people warmly before departing. During normal interaction and when addressing Muslims, eye contact is not appropriate particularly between people of the opposite sex. Muslims will always lower their gaze when communicating with people of the opposite sex. The supervisor should not take it as an insult or unwillingness to communicate.

**Motivation**

From an Islamic point of view, motivation theories vary considerably. Motivation is the driving force that pushes a person towards a particular behavior or action that results from a particular desire, need or achievement (Becker & Wiggins, 2014). Religion is defined in line with culture and was invented to social needs such as the needs to belong, have a role model and have moral order. In Islam, motivation includes spiritual and religious motives. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has been used to outline the sources of motivation among human beings. According to Maslow, human beings achieve basic needs first and move up until they achieve self-actualization. Islam prepares human beings to be motivated towards the achievement of self-actualization. The reward of heaven and pleasure of Allah is the maximum level of motivation an individual receives for hard work and good deeds (Becker & Wiggins, 2014). Access to God’s kingdom fulfills the spiritual, and psychological needs and unlike staying at the level of *Nafs Amarah*, a person tries to reach *Nafs Al Mutma Innah*(Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010)*.*

            As earlier mentioned, Muslims find their motivation in the cultural heritage and religion. When Muslims worship their lord, they are greatly fulfilled and motivated even though there is no material gain they receive. There are various sources of motivation in Islam. They include Allah’s creation, the Sunnah, good companions and the Qur’an (Hughes, 2013). The notion of self-fulfillment plays a major role in motivating Muslim workers. Once workers feel that they are good people who can contribute to the nation, religion and society, they feel they have accomplished an important task in their lives (Becker & Wiggins, 2014). Uplifting of the standards of living also plays an important role in motivating Muslim workers. Muslims do not like living in poverty and would go out of their way to improve their living standards. Finally, service to the nation is an important source of motivation for Muslim workers. Muslims are generally motivated when they are providing service to their nation whether in the army, hospital or the police because they believe they will be rewarded by Allah (Hughes, 2013)*.* Hence, a supervisor can always position Muslim workers in a way that they are motivated within the organization.

**Understanding Beliefs and Practices**

Understanding the religious beliefs and practices of a person with a unique religious or cultural background fosters a sense of belonging among members of a group. Managers and supervisors should always strive to understand the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims for them to be effectively supervised (Ramadani, et al, 2017). Beliefs and practices explain reasons why a person behaves or dresses in a certain manner. Muslims have unique beliefs and practices that range from their dietary requirements to holidays, daily prayers, physical contact and their participation in social events.

Muslim Holidays

The lunar calendar outlines all the Islamic festivals and holidays. Similar to the solar calendar, the lunar calendar has 12 months that are marked by the appearance of a crescent in the horizon (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). A solar year has about 11 more days than a lunar one. It means that Islamic festivals occur 1 day earlier. The most special religious ceremonies in the lunar calendar include:

**Ramadhan**. It is the month of fasting and is the 9th month in the Islamic calendar (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). According to the Islam faith, fasting is a duty for all healthy adults. Ramadhan is meant for increasing the awareness of God. It is a period when Muslims reflect on themselves, renew their focus on spirituality and feel compassion for the needy. It is during this time that Muslims come together to appreciate their unity not only among families but also as a community. Perhaps, Ramadhan is mostly important for the lesson of restrain and discipline that is carried forward to other aspects of life such as education and work (Hughes, 2013). Ramadhan is considered a holy month and thus supervisors should be aware of this religious month on the Islam calendar. The start and end of the Ramadhan period is determined by the sighting of the moon (Hughes, 2013). Supervisors should be aware that during this period, Muslims do not eat or drink but fast from dawn until sunset. They spend the majority of the day meditating or praying. During the night, there is intense prayers among the Muslim faith.

Fasting is mainly for self-reflection, bonding with humanity and receipt of God’s mercy (Hughes, 2013). As a result, supervisors should slightly adjust the working day of Muslims during this period. For instance, Muslims can be allowed to leave early so that they can join their families in ending the day’s fast. Hence, they can start early or shorten their lunch break to cover for their early exit (Becker & Wiggins, 2014). During this period, the employer should also be considerate and avoid holding events such as get-togethers, staff means and away days. In case such events are unavoidable, supervisors should understand if Muslims fail to attend. As mentioned earlier, Ramadhan is when Muslims tend to intensify prayers during the day. In most cases, they are usually at work and a supervisor should make arrangement to set aside a room for them where they can pray at ease.

**Eid (Day of Festivity).**Eid is celebrated by Muslims twice a year (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). The first day is celebrated at the end of the Ramadhan period while the second one is celebrated in the beginning of the tenth day of the twelfth Islamic month (Hughes, 2013). During these festivals, congregational prayers, exchange gifts and family visitations are carried out. In order to celebrate this particular holiday, Muslims are required to take one day off twice a year. Supervisors should not impose any undue penalty on Muslim employees for celebrating the religious holiday

**Pilgrimage to Mecca.** Pilgrimage plays an important role in the Muslim faith. As a Muslim, Hajj is one of the most important obligations. At least once in their lifetime, Muslims are required to go on a pilgrimage to the city of Mecca (Hughes, 2013). It lasts for a week in the beginning of the twelfth month of the Islamic Lunar calendar. The trip to Mecca involves performing various traditions and visiting numerous shrines. However, the trip should be carried out if one is physically and financially able. Muslims who are ill or have physical deformities are excused if they miss the tip to Mecca. Organizations should grant permission to their Muslim employees opt to travel to celebrate the Pilgrimage in Mecca. Supervisors can allow their Muslim employees to schedule their trip well in advance to avoid disruptions at work. Supervisors can organize for them to take a paid leave during this period to avoid discrimination.

Prayer Requests (Daily Prayer). Islam urges individuals to be God conscious. Believers are expected to perform prayers five times a day. Morning prayers are conducted from the break of dawn until sunrise. Noon prayers begin at midday later in the afternoon (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). Afternoon prayers are conducted until almost sunset. Sunset prayers may be offered at the beginning of sunset until when it becomes dark in the evening. Night prayers may be offered at night until late. Muslim prayers are unique compared to those of other religious groups. Before prayer, Muslims are required to wash their hands, faces and feet with clean water.

Washing is normally done in the restroom sink. During worship, they stand, bow and touch their forehead to the ground (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). Worship is often carried in places that are dry, quiet and clean. The worshiper faces Mecca when praying and silence should be observed. During Muslim prayers, the supervisor or any other workers should not walk in front or interrupt the believer. This time, Muslims are often engaged and may not respond to conversations or ringing telephones. Hence, the supervisor should not feel offended when a Muslim does not answer a call during prayer. In cases of an emergency, a Muslim can stop prayers immediately and act accordingly. It usually takes about 15 minutes to wash and pray (Hughes, 2013). As a result, it is possible for Muslims to pray in between meals and break times. Supervisors who are flexible in taking breaks can schedule Muslim employees to fit their prayer periods. For instance, employees on regular day hours may be scheduled to take breaks at noon and afternoon. Night shift Muslim workers may need to pray at work during the night and in the morning. Supervisors must thus come up with reasonable arrangements to allow these employees to have time for their prayers.

Friday Congregational Prayers

Friday is the prayer day for Muslims just as Sunday is for Christians. This day is referred to as *Jum ah*. On this day, Muslims congregate at the mosque at noon. They listen to sermons and address that lasts for between 45 to 90 minutes (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). Supervisors should be aware that Fridays are unique days when Muslims should be given extended lunch breaks. As a result, another non-Muslim employee can be asked to cover for their Muslim counterparts. Also, work missed may be made up by either staying late or coming in earlier the next day depending on the agreement with the supervisor (Ramadani, et al, 2017). In the event that the majority of the employees are Muslims, the business can shut down during this period and resume once the sermon at the mosque is over. The supervisor should not deny a Muslim a chance to attend the Friday prayer as it would amount to religious discrimination.

Appearance

Both men and women of the Islam faith are expected to dress and behave modestly (Becker & Wiggins, 2014). Muslims value and judge both men and women based on skills, contributions and intelligence towards the community rather than their physical attributes.

**Men.** They should be covered at a minimum from the navel down to the knee in clothes that are not transparent or tight-fitting (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). Muslim men also wear beards as it is a requirement by faith. Cleanliness is paramount and should be a health and safety considerations, Muslims with beards may be required to use proper coverings such as masks and nets. Men also wear a small head-covering, *Kufi*, which is a part of their faith.

**Women** Muslim women are required to wear loose-fitting and non-revealing clothing (Marshall Cavendish Reference, 2010). Majority of them wear a hijab which may vary in style. It usually covers the neck, hair and body. Only the face and the hands are not covered. However, there are some Muslims who may wear a face veil (Hughes, 2013).

Businesses with designated uniforms may require that Muslim attire has certain color, style or use a specific fabric. Supervisors can also modify dress code policies to incorporate the issue of diversity. Skullcaps and scarves may be allowed among Muslims to ensure they do not feel discriminated (Ramadani, et al, 2017). Supervisors should hence discuss workplace dress codes with employees and allow for exemptions where necessary.

Other Considerations

**Work/Social events.** According to Ramadani, et al (2017), Muslims may be reluctant and may not be so enthusiastic to take part in celebrations on other faiths such as Halloween and Christmas. Furthermore, they may be less participant in social events where alcohol is being served. Supervisors should not penalize such employees for not attending or participating in such functions. In fact, employers should not mix business meetings with social events where alcohol and other ceremonies are performed. For example, a Muslim employee should not be asked to sell or serve alcohol, cigarettes or any form of illicit drug (Becker & Wiggins, 2014).

**Physical Contact.** There are some Muslims who do not engage in any form of physical contact with unelated persons of the opposite sex. What people consider casual greetings such as cheeks, hand-shaking, hugs and kissing may not be appealing to them (Becker & Wiggins, 2014). The restraint is often considered as personal modesty among some Muslims. In the event a Muslim employee declines to shake hands with a stranger in their place of work, it should not be considered as rude (Ramadani, et al, 2017). Every person has the right for their personal space to be respected regardless of their religious background.

**Dietary Requirements.** In order to establish a good working relationship with Muslim employees, a supervisor should be aware of the dietary requirements of the Islam faith. According to Marshall Cavendish Reference (2010), the Qur’an prohibits any Muslim from taking alcohol or products that contain pork or its by-products. A certain group of Muslims that do not eat animals or animal by-products that are not derived from halal sources. Halal is meat slaughtered according to the laws of Islam. Hence, despite Muslims being careful about the foods they consume, their degrees of observance and sensitivity vary (Ramadani, et al, 2017). Majority of the Muslims do not have a problem consuming chicken and meat prepared by non-Muslims. Employers should hence be sensitive about the food menus and ensure that available food is appropriate for consumption according to the Islamic law.

            In most cases, we often make mistakes by assuming that every behavior of a Muslim is influenced by the Islamic religion or that everyone will practice Islam the same way. How a Muslim practices his/her faith is dependent on upbringing, culture, personal choices and national origin. Importantly, depictions of Muslims since the September 11, 2001 events have been negative. Supervisors should be aware that harassment among the Islamic community is real as majority of them have been subjected to cruel jokes, teasing and even assault. Supervisors should create an inclusive, safe and harassment-free environment where all employees irrespective of their religious or cultural backgrounds can interact. Supervisors can also develop proactive measures such as organizing seminars for people to learn about Islamic religious practices as well as how to prevent conflict. The seminar can also play a major role in eliminating negative perceptions that have over the years been associated with Islam.

Conclusion

Culture plays an important role in supervision. Organizations today have to adjust with having staff members from different cultural and religious background. Everyone in an organization feels loved and safe when supervisors learn about their unique culture with an aim of handling them better. Islam is one of the most popular religions with distinct laws. Muslims all over the world are known to live according to their strict religious policies. Hence, supervisors are required to be aware of these norms and beliefs to avoid offending them. Group dynamics among Muslims are important norms that must be understood by supervisors. Muslims prefer to work in groups. Decisions are made in groups and they believe that coming together as a group has more benefits than working individually. Supervisors should therefore promote team work in accomplishing tasks. Communication is another important element of culture among Muslims that should be considered. Muslims appreciate when a conversation starts with a peace greeting followed by shaking hands in the case the people involved are of the same gender. They however do not maintain eye contact and prefer asking about one’s wellbeing and health among others. On motivation, Muslims aim at achieving self-actualization which is entering heaven. Muslim workers are further motivated by doing good to the nation, uplifting the society and fighting poverty.

Importantly, the supervisor should be aware of Muslim major ceremonies and practices. Ramadhan is often the most popular ceremony in Islam. It is during this time that Muslims seek to cleanse themselves and pray while fasting. Supervisors should make necessary adjustments to ensure that allow Muslims to have their prayer times and also have a conducive environment where they can fast. Supervisors should also be aware that Muslims may not encourage physical contact and have dietary restrictions. Once all these have been identified by the supervisor and the management, necessary adjustments can be made to ensure that Muslims fit in the organization. Embracing different cultures and backgrounds creates unity and team work. People of different backgrounds when brought together come up with new idea and ways of doing things. As a result, the organization becomes more united and improves its performance.

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