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DOES SOCIAL CLASS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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Social class may be less visible than other types of difference. However, in many countries like the U.S., where individualism is valued, it is common to believe that all people are created equal and that the same opportunities are available to everyone who has the innate talent and is willing to put in the effort. This position ignores the challenge of overcoming the social, educational, and networking resources of class origins. This exercise is designed to help you to understand how social class could affect a person's life experience due to differences in access and resources. Although social class in childhood does not necessarily determine status across one's life span, it may limit educational and career options that may make it more difficult for a person to achieve personal goals. Of course, individuals within a social class can have very different experiences due to a variety of factors.

DIRECTIONS

Complete the following two columns by thinking about what is apt to be the more common experience of a child growing up in Justin's or Clark's situation. Considering that Justin represents a child born into the lower socioeconomic class and Clark represents one born into the upper middle class, your answers should reflect what is likely to be the more common experiences for children born into these situations.

Justin was born to a 16-year-old single mother who lived with her family in an inner-city housing project. When he was born, she dropped out of high school to care for him. After he started school, she took a job cleaning rooms in a local hospital. She is currently studying nights to get her General Equivalency Diploma (GED).

Clark was born to a suburban couple in their mid-thirties. His mother has an MBA, and his father is a lawyer. Clark's mother quit her job when he was born. She returned to a managerial position when his younger sibling was in junior high.

	Justin	Clark
How might this child spend his time before he attends kindergarten?		
When he goes to kindergarten, he is diagnosed with a learning disability. What types of help is he most likely to receive?		
During grammar school, how is he likely to spend his school vacations?		
What types of after-school activities is he likely to participate in?		
What role may sports play in his life?		
He needs help with math in high school. What types of resources are most apt to be available to him?		
Where can he learn about technology?		
If his College Board scores aren't too high, what resources may be available to help him raise his scores?		
If he needs an internship in college, who can help him secure one?		
Given the differences of growing up in different social classes, what job-related life and career skills may he have that give him workplace advantages or disadvantages?		

Discussion Questions

1. In terms of the workplace, how does social class matter?
2. Is social class *really* an invisible difference or are there ways that people often deduce other's social class origins? What can be the effect of this in job interviews, work-related social situations, and so on?
3. What role does the media play in perpetuating both positive and negative social class stereotypes? Support your answer with examples.
4. In this exercise, both people were male and no specific race was suggested. Which of your answers might have been different if the examples were female or nonwhite? Why?

SOCIAL CLASS: THE FICTION OF AMERICAN MERITOCRACY

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INTRODUCTION

Oprah Winfrey, the nation's wealthiest African American, overcame impoverished beginnings in rural Mississippi to accumulate an estimated net worth of \$2.7 billion.¹ High school friends Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak founded the Apple Computer Company in Job's garage with \$1300 in start-up money.² Sonia Sotomayor rose from a South Bronx housing project to become a U.S. Supreme Court justice. Such stories of self-made men and women help fuel the perception of America as the land of opportunity, a place where anyone can achieve almost anything with a combination of hard work, intelligence, and determination.

Do you believe that anyone, regardless of the family and community into which he or she was born, *could* be where you are today? If you are like most, your answer is yes. In a *New York Times* poll, 80 percent of Americans answered "yes" to the question, "Is it possible to start out poor, work hard, and become rich?"³ A *Chronicle of Higher Education* poll found that 78.8 percent of college freshman agree that "through hard work, everybody can succeed in American society."⁴

The U.S. economic system is commonly viewed as a "meritocracy" where rewards are bestowed upon those who have earned them. If individuals face equality of opportunity, then one's social class position becomes a reflection of his or her personal qualities. Those who have achieved success must have earned it somehow, and those who have failed to climb the social ladder must simply have not tried hard enough. This common perspective leads to negative stereotyping and discrimination of individuals from lower social classes or "classism."

Classism, like many other "isms," results from prejudices based on false assumptions. Despite widely held perceptions, social class mobility in the United States is far from fluid. Those born with few resources face serious obstacles in their efforts to achieve a higher economic and social status. Those born into privilege are given a head start in life with many extra boosts along the way. Once it is recognized that merit has only a small role in determining one's place on the social ladder, the foundation of classism crumbles.

SOCIAL CLASS MEASUREMENT

The most popular measures of social class are income and wealth. Persons, households or families can be ranked according to their income or wealth and then divided into groups. For example, in 2011, the highest 20 percent of U.S. households had an income exceeding \$101,577—while the

income of households in the lowest quintile fell below \$20,260.⁵ Because of its cumulative nature, wealth is unevenly distributed among the U.S. population, with the top 10 percent of families having an estimated median net worth of just under \$1.2 million and the bottom 20 percent having a median net worth of approximately \$6000. The top 10 percent of families own an estimated 75 percent of the total net worth in the United States.⁶

Social class is also measured by educational achievement and occupational prestige. A National Opinion Research Center survey ranked 447 jobs in terms of their prestige level. Doctors come in first, accountants 35th, elementary school teachers 45th, retail salespersons 366th, and dishwashers 446th.⁷ A *New York Times* interactive site allows individuals to enter their occupation, education, income, and wealth in order to determine where they fall in the social class hierarchy. A housekeeper with an eighth grade education making \$20,000 per year and holding \$5000 in net worth is in the 16th percentile of total social class. A surgeon making \$300,000 per year, with \$1 million net worth is in the 99th percentile.⁸

CLASS IN THE WORKPLACE

The frequency of workplace interaction between persons of different social classes will vary by occupation and industry. For example, in occupations such as construction and education, workers are less likely to have frequent interactions with coworkers from significantly different social classes. In other settings, particularly when there is a hierarchical structure, individuals are more likely to work closely with those from other social classes. In hospitals, for example, doctors, nurses, LNAs, and maintenance workers come into frequent contact with one another (Scully & Blake-Beard, 2006, p. 442).

Defining class in the workplace is complicated by its multidimensional nature. While income, wealth, education, and occupation are undoubtedly correlated, associations are not always perfect. A carpenter may never have finished high school or he may be a college graduate. A retail salesperson may be a single mother working as the sole breadwinner for her family or a college-educated, married mother working for extra income.

In a meritocracy, those higher on the social ladder have done something to deserve their place and are therefore somehow "better" than those below them. The resulting sense of status can undoubtedly lead to friction in the workplace. According to Bullock (2004),

In the United States, individualistic explanations for poverty (e.g., lack of thrift, laziness) and wealth (e.g., hard work, ability) tend to be favored over structural or societal attribution for poverty (e.g., failure of society to provide strong schools, discrimination) and wealth (e.g., inheritance, political influence, and 'pull'). (p. 232)

Bullock further argues that these beliefs lead to "classism" including negative stereotypes such as "lazy, uninterested in self-improvement, and lacking in initiative and intelligence" and discrimination that includes "behaviors that distance, avoid, and/or exclude poor and working class people" (p. 232).

Thus classism is rooted in the ultimate faith in America as a meritocracy. Economic and social outcomes are a function of merit because individuals face equality of opportunity. Level playing fields promote social class mobility. Unfortunately, this is an idealistic view that fails to stand up under scrutiny. Social class mobility is very much constrained by existing economic and social systems. The movement of individuals from one social class to another is the exception, rather than the rule. Much of where you end up depends on where you begin.

SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES

In contrast to popular opinion, a number of studies have concluded that (1) social class is actually quite sticky, (2) class mobility has not increased in recent decades (and may even have decreased)⁹ and (3) the United States has a relatively low level of social mobility compared with other developed nations. For example,

- 53.3 percent of the families who were in the *lowest* income quintile in 1988 were still there in 1998. Only 10.7 percent of those families made it into the top two quintiles (Bradbury & Katz, 2002).
- 53.2 percent of the families who were in the *highest* income quintile in 1988 were still there in 1998. Only 8.7 percent had fallen to the lowest two quintiles (Bradbury & Katz, 2002).
- One intergenerational study found that 6% of those born into the lowest income quintile end up in the highest while 42% stay in the bottom quintile (Isaacs, 2008).
- A different intergenerational study found that while 32.3 percent of white children born into the poorest income quintile were there as adults, this number jumps to 62.9 percent for blacks (Hertz, 2006).
- The odds of reaching the top 5 percent of income earners is less than 2 percent for anyone starting out in the bottom 3 quintiles (Hertz, 2006).
- Parental income is highly correlated with the future income of children in the United States. The intergenerational elasticity of earnings is estimated to be .47 indicating that a 10 percent change in parental earnings is predicted to have a 4.7 percent change in the expected future earning of the child (Hertz, 2006).
- In a 27 country survey, only 19% of Americans agreed that “coming from a wealthy family is essential/very important to getting ahead,” yet in a comparison of nine high income countries, the United States was second to last in terms of intergenerational mobility (Isaacs, 2008a).

These studies paint a picture of a country where class mobility is significantly less fluid than most people would like to believe. The correlation between parent and child income and the low probability of moving up the income ladder seem to indicate that “making it” must not be as simple as setting a goal and working hard to achieve it. Of course, some parent-child correlation is expected. Sawhill and McLanahan (2006) write “the attributes that contribute to success in both generations—ability, motivation, and health—are at least partially inherited” (p. 5). However, such a high level of intergenerational correlation indicates that there is more than genetics at work.

If the playing field were truly level we would see significantly more movement between classes. Many more of those born into poverty would work their way up the ladder and many more of those born rich would find themselves sliding down.

EDUCATION

Equality of education is often cited as the key to social mobility. If our educational system ensured equal access and opportunities for all, regardless of social class, then the playing field would be significantly leveled. Unfortunately, socioeconomic status has a great deal of influence on what students bring to, as well as what they take from, the classroom. In summarizing sixteen recently published works on educational opportunity, McPherson and Schapiro (2006) conclude, “Educational opportunity in the United States is simply spectacularly unequal” (p. 6). Children’s academic achievements are heavily dependent on the income, education, and race of their parents.

Elementary and Secondary Schools

Measures of math, reading, and social skills show significant differences among socioeconomic groups as early as kindergarten.¹⁰ Possible explanations for this gap include differences in birth weight, health, parental skills, and the effect of stress on neurocognitive development.¹¹ While high quality preschool programs can offset some of the disadvantages faced by lower-income children, access to such programs is extremely limited (Barnett & Belfield, 2006).

The disadvantages that individual poor children face become compounded in the aggregate. The primary source of funds for public elementary and secondary schools is property taxes. Thus, wealthier communities with higher housing values have greater sources of revenue. In many states, this disparity is offset somewhat by additional state funds going to poorer communities. However, poorer districts tend to have higher costs due to a greater proportion of special education and higher needs children, with resulting in higher wage costs. The same dollar simply doesn't go as far in a poorer neighborhood school.

Even if resources were equalized, children from poorer communities face additional obstacles. Academic expectations from parents, neighbors, and teachers may be lower for children from poorer backgrounds. There is a good deal of evidence from experimental studies that show students will achieve more if more is expected of them (Rouse & Barrow, 2006). Unfortunately, teachers are not impervious to stereotyping and discrimination. One study found that given children with equal academic abilities, teachers were more likely to recommend the children with "high status" names to a gifted and talented program (Figlio, 2005).

Postsecondary Education

A college education improves social class rank in many ways. Education level itself is a measure of social class, occupations that require a college education tend to be more prestigious and a college education usually leads to higher income. In 1977, college graduates made 40 percent more than high school graduates. By 2010 this premium had increased to over 80 percent (James, 2012). This relationship between a college education and social class is amplified by the tendency of college graduates to marry one another. For example, a college-educated married couple each making the median income for his or her gender would have a household income of almost \$124,000 (in 2010), while for a single, high school-educated woman, the median income is just under 30,000.¹²

While 91 percent of all 10th grade students aspire to a college education,¹³ this dream is particularly difficult to achieve for students from low income families. While financial constraints are an obvious factor, other issues play an important role as well.

KNOWLEDGE The first hurdle faced by less privileged high school students is the general lack of knowledge about the "college education game." Selecting potential colleges, understanding and applying for financial aid, putting the right materials together, all of these are more difficult for families who are unfamiliar with the process. In fact only one-third of inner-city students take the SATs by October of their senior year, compared with 97 percent of suburban students (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006).

PREPAREDNESS Bowen (2006) argues that, in contrast to ability to pay, "more consequential factors include college preparedness in all of its dimensions such as health, attitudes at home, motivation, the availability of information, the quality of elementary and secondary

education, out-of-school enrichment opportunities, and residential and social segregation” (p. 25). Quantifiable results support this argument. SAT scores are directly and positively correlated with family income. In 2011, students with a family income of less than \$20,000 per year had an average combined SAT score of 1323, while those whose families made more than \$200,000 had an average combined score of 1721.¹⁴ Hill and Winston (2006) find that only 13 percent of the students from the bottom two income quintiles would qualify for admission to the nation’s most selective colleges and universities.

AFFORDABILITY There are three general categories of postsecondary education: a state system including community colleges, private four-year colleges, and the elite college or university. For generations, state schools have been a means for lower income students to gain access to higher education. Unfortunately, the recent trend has been for a decrease in state support for such institutions. In many states, public funding has decreased and tuition has risen sharply. Because the increased tuition has not made up for falling state expenditures, per pupil expenditure and faculty salaries are beginning to lag (Kane, Orszag, & Gunter, 2003).

A majority of private, four-year colleges have academic standards that are not out of reach for students of low income backgrounds. Unfortunately, these institutions tend to have lower endowments and are therefore heavily tuition dependent. There has been a growing tendency for such institutions to increase the emphasis on “merit” as a criterion for financial aid and to decrease the emphasis on “need” (McPherson & Schapiro, 2006). The source of this shift is a topic for debate, but many feel that it is driven by publications such as *U.S. News and World Report*, whose college rankings are determined, in part, by the academic credentials of students. This shift in emphasis toward merit and away from need is doubly hurtful to economically disadvantaged kids who don’t have the cash for tuition or the high SAT scores the colleges want.

The final category of postsecondary education is the elite college or university. Such schools have plenty of endowment money and can afford to meet any economic need a family might face. The problem is a lack of qualified students. Of those students who score 1420 or better on the SAT, 3.7 percent are from the lowest income quintile while 45.9 percent are from the highest income quintile (Hill & Winston, 2006).

A lack of information, academic preparedness, and financial means constitute a significant obstacle for poorer children in achieving a college education. In 2010, 51 percent of high school graduates from the lowest income quintile began college right away. For the highest income quintile this figure was 82 percent.¹⁵ In 2005, 53 percent of children from the highest-income families attained college degrees while only 11% of those from the poorest families were able to achieve this goal (Hakins, 2008a).

The education of children begins at birth. The income and education of their parents; the quality of their neighborhood, peers, and school; and the opportunities for outside enrichment will all have an effect on the intellectual growth of children. Children born into privilege are read to more and taken to museums and libraries. Their parents attend more school functions. Their families have the time and money for extracurricular activities, enriching not only their educational experience, but their odds of gaining admittance to the college of their choice. In school, they are surrounded by high-achieving peers and teachers with high expectations. If trouble arises, tutors can be hired. A high quality college education is both achievable and affordable. While it is certainly not impossible for children from lower socioeconomic groups to achieve the goal of a college education, it is clearly a more daunting task.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

In their book *The Meritocracy Myth*, Stephen McNamee and Robert Miller, Jr., explain the importance of social and cultural capital in gaining access to quality educational and employment opportunities. They argue that social capital or “who you know” is critical in developing “academic aspirations” and is therefore directly related to a child’s academic success. More directly, personal connections are very helpful in job placement and advancement. Those from lower socioeconomic groups are disadvantaged in terms of social capital as they “tend to be members in resource-poor networks that share a relatively restricted variety of information and influence” (p. 78).

Cultural capital or “fitting in” is also critical to upward mobility. Belonging to a group means knowing about the things they know. Cultural capital is accumulated from birth. The things a person knows about, the things he values, and the way he dresses and speaks will have much to do with the environment in which he is raised. McNamee and Miller argue that the accumulation of cultural capital is not perfectly correlated with socioeconomic status, as some lower income parents may emphasize cultural knowledge or young adults may seek it on their own. However, such information is “often esoteric, specialized, costly, and time-consuming to accumulate” (McNamee & Miller, p. 71). Because such knowledge is easier to pick up along the way than to consciously learn, there is a strong tendency for those born into a particular group to acquire the cultural capital necessary to “fit in” with that group.

Scully and Blake-Beard (2006) emphasize the importance of cultural capital in the identification of social class in the workplace. Dress, speech patterns, accents, manners, and reasoning styles are all used to distinguish those of different classes. The player must fit the part and “people from privileged backgrounds often enter organizations with this kind of style already in hand” (p. 441). In competition for jobs and promotions, the sheer number of equally qualified applicants can make style, in all its forms, the “tie-breaker.”

HOMEOWNERSHIP AND NEIGHBORHOOD EFFECTS

The probability of owning one’s own home increases significantly with income and wealth. While 83 percent of those individuals from the highest income quintile own their own homes, only 40% of those from the lowest quintile do (Haskins, 2008b). This is important because home ownership itself is associated with numerous personal and social benefits. To begin with, a house is a primary source of wealth. This accumulation of wealth has an intergenerational effect, as home equity can be used to finance a child’s education or can be passed down as an inheritance. Additionally, studies have found multiple positive effects on children whose families own their own home. Holding family characteristics constant, home ownership leads to improvements in home environment (physical condition of the house itself, the presence of educational materials, self esteem, mental and physical health). When families own their homes, their kids do better in school, receiving higher test scores and getting into less trouble. (Again, this is holding other family characteristics constant.) The improvement in educational outcomes may be due to the improvements in home environment, as well as an increased probability of remaining in the same school for a longer period of time (Haurin, 2003).

There are spillover effects of home ownership as well. Owners have a stake in the capital gains on their homes. They have a greater incentive to maintain their homes and push for better community resources, including safety and quality schools. Better public services increase property values and thus the wealth of the individuals living in the community.

While neighborhood quality is dependent on the values of the families residing therein, the reverse may also be true. We have seen that residents of affluent neighborhoods have access to higher quality schools and superior social and cultural capital. Incorporated into the concept of social capital is the broader notion of neighborhood effects. The general question is whether individuals are affected by the behavior of those around them. It seems intuitive that people are social and therefore not immune to the values of those with whom they associate. The empirical literature on family and peer influences on economic and social outcomes is extensive. While it is generally accepted that families play the largest role, the role of the neighborhood is more controversial with some studies finding significant effects and others dismissing these effects as inseparable from the role of the family.

In any discussion of socioeconomic outcomes there is a difficulty in separating out the effect of race. Home ownership rates are much lower for minorities than for whites, with 75 percent of whites owning their own homes, as opposed to 46 percent of blacks and 48 percent of Hispanics (Ohlemacher, 2006). Much of this difference is simply due to the lower average income of minorities. In fact, one study found that, holding income and wealth constant, minorities were no less likely to own their homes than whites (Di & Liu, 2005).

However, in terms of neighborhoods, the United States is highly segregated by race. It has been estimated that 65 percent of blacks would need to relocate in order to achieve full geographical integration (Friedman, 2006). Some of this clustering is explained by economics, as minorities are more likely to be poor and neighborhoods tend to be homogenous in terms of income. However, McNamee and Miller (2004) argue that only 20–25 percent of black segregation is explained by economic factors. They go on to say that, in general, blacks do want integrated neighborhoods, but whites do not. It is estimated that more than 60 percent of blacks face housing discrimination. Samantha Friedman (2006) reports that blacks—regardless of whether they are urban or suburban—face poorer neighborhood conditions, including trash, abandoned buildings, bars on the windows, and more “social disorder.”

Once again, we see the self-perpetuating nature of social class. Those born with less are less likely to live in their own homes. The result is a lower quality of life for parents and children alike. Educational quality suffers as children change schools more often. Families lose out on an important source of wealth, one that could be used as a source of financing for investments in their children’s future. Residents of poor neighborhoods suffer from a lack of funding for public goods, including safety and education. Such neighborhoods lack quality social networks, peers, and role models. These problems are exacerbated for minorities, who face housing discrimination and neighborhood segregation.

RACE AND GENDER

Issues of race, gender, and class often intersect, making it difficult to isolate individual sources of stereotyping and discrimination. Minorities have lower average values for commonly used measures of social class status. While 17 percent of whites are in the lowest income quintile, the figure is 34 percent for blacks and 25 percent for Hispanics (See Note 5). While 31 percent of adult whites have at least a bachelor’s degree, only 20 percent of blacks and 14 percent of Hispanics have achieved this level of education.¹⁶ Finally, occupational prestige is significantly lower for blacks than whites, although the gap does appear to be shrinking (Kim & Tamborini, 2006).

Tom Hertz (2006) completed an extensive study of social mobility and found that among those born into the poorest income quartile, blacks are twice as likely as whites to remain poor

and only one quarter as likely to move to the highest quartile. He also finds that a significant portion of the income gap between blacks and whites is due to factors other than parental attributes, such as education, occupation, attitudes, and behavior. Isaacs (2008b) finds a significant difference in downward mobility for black children: "A startling 45 percent of black children whose parents were solidly middle income end up falling to the bottom income quintile while only 16 percent of white children born to parents in the middle make this decent" (p. 76).

Gender and social class are also intrinsically linked. Women make approximately 75 cents on the dollar compared with men (Bergmann, 2005). While women have made significant headway in terms of education (according to the NCES, 57 percent of bachelor's degrees in 2010 were awarded to women), there is still significant segregation by occupation. Pay and prestige vary by occupation. For example, chemical engineers—86 percent of which are men—have a prestige ranking of 6th and an average annual income of approximately \$99,000. Nursing, on the other hand is a predominantly female occupation (92 percent) and has a prestige rank of 31 and an average annual income of \$69,000.¹⁷

Workers without a college degree are often segregated into blue collar and pink-collar occupations. Again the prestige (given in parentheses) and pay vary by field. Women are a vast majority of the workers in such fields as secretarial (186), hairdressing (313), and childcare workers (335). Men represent a strong majority in such fields as firefighting (111), electricians (135), and auto mechanics (278). An interesting example is teaching, where 98 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers are women and the occupational prestige ranking is 100. For secondary school teachers, women's representation falls to 57 percent and the prestige rank increases to 34.

The relationship between occupational pay/prestige and gender has a certain chicken-and-the-egg quality. Do women's occupations pay less because they are women's occupations or are women somehow steered into these occupations? Is prestige a function of gender representation or vice versa? Such questions are important, but whatever the cause, the result is the same. Many low-paying, low-prestige jobs are filled by women. Thirty-four percent of women working full time in 2011 earned less than \$30,000—while the figure for men was 23 percent.¹⁸

Because social class is intrinsically linked to gender and race, issues of classism, sexism, and racism are often intertwined. The disadvantages faced by poor black women are more than merely the sum of the disadvantages faced by each particular group. It is also wrong to assume that some "isms" are merely mistaken for others. While women and minorities are overrepresented among the poor, it is incorrect to say that racism and sexism are simply classism in disguise or vice versa.

Social class diversity undoubtedly deserves its own seat at the table. As Jim Vander Putten (2001) argues, Bill Gates and an Appalachian coal miner are quite different, even though they are both white men. In fact, when a group of experts were asked which they would choose at birth if they could—race, class, or gender—the vast majority picked class (Sawhill & McLanahan, 2006). The relevance of social class should not, however, minimize the importance of race and gender as each "will have a great deal to do with the resources (social as well as financial) that are available to us as individuals, the reactions that we will face from other individuals and our self image" (Albelda, Drago, & Shulman, 2004, p. 129).

Scully and Blake-Beard argue that not only is it inappropriate to emphasize class at the expense of race and gender, it may be dangerous to do so. "A potential blind spot of class analyses can be a stance that class trumps all other dimensions of identity as it is the most fundamental, economically situated identity. This stance does not help for building alliances across members of different social identity groups committed to working on diversity and justice" (p. 448).

CLASS IN THE WORKPLACE REVISITED

Workplace attitudes toward social class are certainly a reflection of the attitudes of the greater society. An appreciation of the difficulties facing individuals from less privileged backgrounds is a good first step in diminishing biases held by those working within an organization. However, the categorization of social class as something determined outside of an organization can make things worse.

Scully and Blake-Beard argue that many organizations view social class identity as something that is determined before the employee walks through the door. What these businesses fail to see is that their own practices often reinforce preexisting social class stratification. One example of such a reinforcing policy is the rise in credentialism. The precise qualifications of a potential employee are often difficult to measure, especially when the application process is still in the paper stages. In order to efficiently rank applicants, employers often use educational achievement as a sorting mechanism. When the ability to do the job is not dependent on an academic degree, social class stratification becomes unjustly reinforced.

Businesses create positions and put their own values on them. They decide what the pay level will be and what the “perks” will be (office space, restrooms, lunch rooms, leave policies, educational benefits). Thus, as Scully and Blake-Beard argue, “organizations are where social class is constructed and enacted” (p. 446). Any organization attempting to break the psychology of class-based discrimination must look not only at society at large, but also within its own walls.

A MULTI-LAYERED APPROACH TO CHANGE

The social class structure within an organization both reflects and reinforces attitudes toward class held by society at large. Stereotypes justified by a meritocratic myth must be challenged at all levels, from national economic policies to business-specific diversity training. At all levels, the measurement of merit and existing institutional reward systems must be called into question.

At the national level, while the stickiness of social class has remained fairly constant over time, relative income positions have widened. This is due to a dramatic increase in income inequality in the United States. According to Bernstein (2006), “Since the late 1970s, the real after-tax income of those at the top of the income scale grew by 200 percent... and those at the bottom, 9 percent” (p. 84). The average American has been treading water for some time, while the rich have gotten significantly richer. Possible explanations for this change are many. However, one quick statistic is illuminating. In 2009 the federal minimum wage was \$7.25 per hour. In real terms (inflation adjusted) the value of the minimum wage in 1968 was \$9.27 per hour. As the range of incomes has spread, the difference between rich and poor has become more pronounced. A full-time minimum-wage worker earns \$14,500 annually, while the average S&P 500 CEO pulls in \$8.3 million (Simon, 2007). As this relative reward system changes, so does the implicit value of the work being done.

There are signs that Americans are becoming uncomfortable with the current obstacles facing the poor. There has been a surge in support for higher minimum wages and the federal rate has increased by \$2.10 between 2007 and 2009. There has also been an increased role for the

federal government in education policy (No Child Left Behind) and a building momentum for some type of universal health care coverage. However, given the widespread belief in a meritocratic system, government policy will probably play only a small role in minimizing the benefits associated with class and in aiding the mobility of those at the bottom. Institutional changes are also needed.

A glaring example of the disconnect between rewards and merit is the unequal access to higher education. This is a particularly important issue because a college education is linked to higher income, wealth, and occupational prestige, as well as numerous positive effects on future children. Admissions policies that emphasize standardized test scores and ability to pay reward existing class privilege. SATs, which many argue are a relatively poor predictor of college success, are heavily weighted in admissions decisions and are highly correlated with economic resources. Fortunately, the trend toward SAT prep courses, admissions coaches, and merit-based aid is beginning to produce a backlash of sorts.

A number of colleges are implementing plans to increase the number of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Universities such as Princeton, Harvard, and Brown have replaced loans with grants for low-income students. The University of Virginia and the University of North Carolina have gone one step further in improving recruitment efforts from lower income groups (Tebbs & Turner, 2006). A growing number of colleges and universities are making SAT scores optional in the admissions process. Improved access to higher education by members of lower economic classes will carry many of the same benefits as greater representation of racial minorities. A diverse student body (in all aspects) promotes understanding of differing world views and helps to diminish negative stereotyping.

While many of the components of social class are determined outside of the workplace, it is a serious mistake to assume class is simply exogenous to an organization. Businesses themselves must realize that social class is reinforced within their own walls. Are qualified persons from all social classes considered for job openings? Is everyone given equal access to opportunities once employed, or are outward symbols of social class, such as dress and speech patterns, weighed in these decisions? Are academic credentials being used as appropriate placement tools or are they being used to unjustly eliminate people from consideration?

Businesses should also take a hard look at wages and benefits. Are only some employees given access to paid leave and educational opportunities? If so, are these differences justified? Are symbols of class apparent in the work environment, executive washrooms, and lunchrooms, for example? According to Bullock (2004), changes in workplace policies will meet with resistance, "Creating a more just workplace requires middle-class managers and others in positions of authority to examine the implications of 'business as usual' and take personal responsibility for the classist policies and practices within their own organization. For those who unquestioningly accept their class privilege as earned, this will likely be a difficult process" (p. 241).

Because social class is commonly viewed as something that is changeable, resulting inequities are often seen as deserved. But like racism and sexism, classism is based on false assumptions about underlying differences between groups. Structures and systems create a set of rewards that typically reinforce the status quo. Americans need to take a hard look at the way the system really works, how merit is measured and rewarded. Only then will conceptions of the personal qualities of those of lower status be questioned and discrimination reduced.

RELIGION IN THE U.S. WORKPLACE

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INTRODUCTION

What is the role of religion in the U.S. workplace and why does it matter? These questions are the central concern of this article. To place them in context, this article begins with a focus on the historical role of religion in the U.S. and a summary of the most common religions practiced. It next considers how the presence of religion in the workplace may play out, first with a brief view of the positive contributions religion can bring to the workplace; and then with an examination of the workplace challenges religious practice introduces. Finally, the best practices aimed at religious accommodation are considered, that is how employers and employees can assure that the diversity of religions helps add value to the organization's output.

THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States is often described as a "Judeo-Christian nation," a country founded on a combination of Jewish and Christian religious principles. This belief about the country's religious foundations has had a significant impact on the way U.S. business is conducted. The indigenous peoples of North America had their own ancient ancestral religions. Christianity first appeared in the late 1500s, when Queen Isabella of Spain sent Catholic missionaries to the Pueblos in modern-day New Mexico in an effort to convert them from their Native religious traditions. Through forceful evangelizing, many Pueblos eventually became Catholic. Later when the first immigrants arrived from England to settle Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, they brought with them a Protestant form of Christianity called "Anglicanism." So, the American colonies were founded, in part, on Christian principles, but Christianity was not the first religion in North America.

The desire for both profit and religious freedom did bring more settlers to America. The people we know as the Pilgrims were dissatisfied members of the Church of England who came to Massachusetts in the early 1600's seeking to practice a purified form of Anglicanism. Known as "Puritans," they demanded uniformity of belief and did not tolerate religious dissent. Consequently, critics of the religious leaders like Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were

banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and would settle in or found colonies such as Rhode Island and Maryland. New European immigrants of the Dutch Reformed Church and Jews came to settle in New Netherlands and New Amsterdam (present-day New York). Later, during the slave trade of the 17th and 18th centuries, the people enslaved from West Africa brought new forms of worship that would eventually be melded with Christianity.

Though the Puritans came to America in search of religious liberty, their demand for strict adherence to the church's doctrines created a new kind of authoritarianism. So, in 1682 William Penn established his "holy experiment" in Pennsylvania where all faiths were made welcome, though only Protestants were granted the right to vote.

More than a century after the arrival of Puritanism, the ability of a group to impose its religion through force of law ended in America. In declaring independence from England, the Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the Constitution, ratified in 1787, asserted that citizens had God-given rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." To ensure these rights would be protected, the Congress appended to the Constitution in 1791 the Bill of Rights with the provision that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ..."

When Americans discovered the open land of the western frontier, they saw it as an opportunity for greater political and religious freedom and individual fortune. A new, more fervent religious revival led to a mass westward migration where populist and utopian communities could take root. Though the formal authority of Puritan church leaders had been replaced by religious independence, the moral values of Puritanism, especially its work ethic, animated the desire for survival and success in the wilderness.

Ever since the Protestant Reformation in 16th century Europe, Protestant theology emphasized the moral value of work. To work was to serve both God and society. Individual and communal survival in the American frontier required hard work, responsibility and frugality. These moral values became American ideals and the path to prosperity. In the 19th century the American West and South were largely agricultural societies, while the North was becoming industrialized. The Protestant work ethic that had developed the West became the business principle of the new industries and, as the German sociologist Max Weber said in 1905, contributed to the "spirit of capitalism." Religion and business became partners; thrift and hard work would again bring national prosperity, this time through industrialization.

The financial success of industrialized work, however, was not shared by the workers. The desire for profit and the cost of buildings, machinery, supplies and labor required business owners to run their factories as many hours as possible. Working conditions favored the owner rather than the worker, and long hours, low wages and dangerous physical environments became common.

In the 1930's the Great Depression changed the fortunes of all Americans, workers and owners alike. Poverty overwhelmed the country as the economic gains of industry vanished in the Stock Market Crash of 1929. A "social gospel" that called for shared wealth and care for the poor replaced the earlier belief that prosperity was ordained by God. In the "Cold War" with the Soviet Union, Christianity became the enemy of communism and the proof of one's patriotism (<http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica>).

THE FIVE MAIN U.S. RELIGIONS AT A GLANCE

Until well after World War II, Christian religions predominated in the U.S. religious landscape, and in the postwar years, the picture became gradually more complex, largely due to increased immigration. The Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Forum indicates that most Americans now identify with one of five major religions—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam

and Hinduism. Each of these religions has various forms and traditions within it and expresses its beliefs through particular kinds of worship and prayer, rituals, dietary rules, and modes of dress. What follows is a description of the main beliefs or principles that define each religion.

The majority of Americans identify themselves as **Christian** (see Table 4-1). **Christianity** has many denominations, but all of these share a belief that there is one God who is revealed through human history. Christians believe that Jesus was God's Son who came to earth as a man and he was killed about 30 CE by authorities of the Roman Empire, but came back to life and ascended to heaven. Christians claim that all who profess their belief in the Resurrection of Jesus will be received into heaven after death.

Judaism began about 1900 BCE in Israel, and shares the belief that God acts in human history, especially in times of struggle and oppression. The "Tanak," Judaism's Scripture, tells the story of how the Jews were repeatedly conquered and enslaved by foreign powers, but were freed by God's power acting through figures such as Abraham, Moses, and David. Jews believe that God made a "covenant" or promise to protect them as long as they continue to believe in and worship the one God.

Islam began in the 7th century CE and, like Christianity and Judaism, originated in the Middle East. From an Arabic word meaning "submitting," Islam also professes belief in one God, Allah. Muslims (those who practice Islam) focus on living their lives according to God's will, which is revealed through the "Qur'an" (the Scripture) and a long line of messengers. Mohammed is revered as the last and most important prophet of the religion and is said to have received the words of the Qur'an directly from God in a series of visions.

Buddhism was founded between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE in northeastern India. Based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, a royal prince who became known as the Buddha (Enlightened One), it encompasses several schools of thought, established over the centuries by different teachers. In general, Buddhists believe that earthly life is a continuous cycle of birth and death that is the cause of human suffering. When we finally escape this cycle to achieve a state of being called "nirvana," we become, like the Buddha, enlightened.

Hinduism is the oldest of the major world religions and began in India around 2500 BCE. Hindus believe in one Supreme Reality, called Brahman, which takes many forms and names. Hindus seek to be in harmony with Brahman by living an ethically good life through self-discipline, the sharing of wealth and following the teachings of the Scriptures (Vedas). Like Buddhists, they believe in reincarnation (the cycle of re-birth) and seek to escape it to achieve union with God.

Table 4-1 Major Religious Traditions in the U.S.

Christian	78.4	Other Religions	4.7
Protestant	51.3	Jewish	1.7
Catholic	23.9	Buddhist	0.7
Mormon	1.7	Muslim	0.6
Jehovah's Witness	0.7	Hindu	0.4
Orthodox	0.6	Other religions	<0.3
Other Christian	0.3		
		Unaffiliated	16.1
		Declined	0.8

Table 4-1 lists the major religious traditions found in the U.S. as reported in the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2008).

RELIGION IN THE WORKPLACE

Many people who involve themselves seriously in their religion try to integrate their religious practice into all parts of their lives, including work. They want deeper satisfaction from their work, what we might think of as a spiritual involvement. For example, the Christian may think of the workplace as an important part of her life's work, a journey that leads toward the holy state of sanctification (Sire, 1990). Attempts at such faith integration that involve the workplace, who we are and who we are becoming as a person, how we think and feel, and what we do as a member of a specific religion, are increasing (Cafferky, 2011). David Miller, executive director of Yale University's Center for Faith and Culture, has observed that religion in the workplace is "a bona fide social movement" whose significance is growing (Fenner, 2007).

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF RELIGION IN THE WORKPLACE

Religion can make an important contribution to an organization's culture because it provides commonly held, shared values that connect people. An organization's culture is a shared understanding of what the organization is, how it ought to be, and how its members should behave, i.e., the shared collective beliefs, values and norms of its members. It emerges as a result of people working together and giving meaning to their shared environment. As a result, members are likely to readily pool their efforts in line with the organization's strategy and move forward with collaborative commitment. Because a strong organizational culture is difficult to build and nearly impossible to imitate, it can provide the organization with a valuable competitive advantage.

An inclusion of religion in the workplace can also contribute to the organization's ability to understand their diverse stakeholders, including customers. It creates another access point to cultural knowledge that is so important in a diverse marketplace.

The numbers of mainstream companies that involve religion as a part of their organizational culture are growing, and include Walt Disney, American Express, some Wal-Mart subsidiaries, Marriott, Amway and Chick-Fil-A. For example, Chick-Fil-A, whose CEO is an evangelical Christian, closes over 1,000 restaurants on Sunday in order to observe the Sabbath. In addition to involvement at the top levels, voluntary prayer groups are encouraged in many organizations in the government, non-profit and for-profit sectors. There are also service companies such as Chaplains at Work that provide faith-based and nondenominational support services to corporations, with services ranging from crisis intervention to general clergy duties such as marital counseling and hospital visits (Religion in Business, n.d.).

This trend is in opposition to the traditional we have come to expect, rooted in Thomas Jefferson's concept of the separation of church and state, although it may be much closer to the practices of our earlier forebears. Now, though, the workforce is diversified, and, as it brings faith beliefs to work, members may encounter assumptions about being and doing in the world that are different from and possibly contradict their own. This can be unsettling, and in many organizations that have not addressed religion directly, it has become an uncomfortable subject. Melissa Dylan's recent on-line contribution to a discussion of religion in the workplace is an example. She pointed out that

too much God-Talk (is) unprofessional... This week I opened an interdepartmental e-mail and found a line from scripture quoted as part of the signature line. When religion comes up in the workplace, it is difficult to know how to react. Arguments fly

in both directions: inclusion of religion in the workplace can lead to camaraderie and bring a deeper sense of meaning to work. But choosing a deity to worship excludes those with different beliefs. Both arguments are valid, but they miss a very important point: *religion has nothing to do with it.* (Dylan, 2006)

CHALLENGES THAT ACCOMPANY RELIGION IN THE WORKPLACE

Often conflict issues with religion in the workplace result from the desire for the religious practitioner to have a unified life and practice religion beyond the bounds of belief. The potential conflict areas include the way the employee self-presents, including demeanor, dress and hairstyle, their desire that others conform to their dress and modesty values. They might desire to proselytize and convert others to a belief system that has brought goodness to their lives. Diet might also be an area of conflict, as could observance practice, including holidays and prayer patterns.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees citizens two rights: the right to be free of a government-imposed religion and the right to practice any religion. Those rights, along with the freedom of expression also guaranteed by the First Amendment, are joined by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (see below) that prohibits disparate treatment, disparate impact and the creation of a hostile environment.

TITLE VII OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 AND RELIGION

Title VII provides the basis for understanding and interpreting religion and its relationship to the work environment. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines religion in terms of observance and practice as well as beliefs. Title VII includes not only traditional, organized religions, but also religious beliefs that are new, not part of a formal church or sect, or only subscribed to by a small number of people. "Title VII protections also extend to those who are discriminated against or need accommodation because they profess no religious beliefs" (EEOC, 2010).

Title VII establishes that every worker has a right to reasonable accommodation for religion. This accommodation might include days off for religious holidays and schedule adjustments for weekly observance; the right to wear clothing signifying religious membership, such as a scarf or turban; having a place to pray; having appropriate food and beverages available in the cafeteria or at company gatherings. Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist colleagues may be vegetarian or vegan, or refrain from specific foods such as pork, and not drink alcohol. Modesty for women may be important and may include wearing a covering (*abaya*, *burqa* or *hijab*). Prayer during the day, fasting and pilgrimage may be part of the employee's regular practice. All religions follow a slightly different religious calendar, lunar in the case of Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. Christians follow a year-long calendar, either the Gregorian or the Julian version, that commemorates the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Reasonable accommodations are arrangements that eliminate the religious conflict for the employee and does not cause undue hardship on the employer. If the requested accommodation would cause the employer undue hardship, the employer must demonstrate that a good faith effort has been made to meet the employee's religious need and that the suggested accommodation would cause hardship. Undue hardship often is demonstrated by addressing the suggested accommodation's cost impact. Exhibit 4-1 contains examples of the application of reasonable accommodation.



Points of Law

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals because of their religion in hiring, firing, and other terms and conditions of employment. Title VII covers employers with fifteen or more employees, including state and local governments, employment agencies and labor organizations, as well as the federal government.

Under Title VII:

Employers may not treat employees or applicants more or less favorably because of their religious beliefs or practices—except to the extent a religious accommodation is warranted. For example, an employer may not refuse to hire individuals of a certain religion, may not impose stricter promotion requirements for persons of a certain religion, and may not impose more or different work requirements on an employee because of that employee's religious beliefs or practices.

Employees cannot be forced to participate—or not participate—in a religious activity as a condition of employment.

Employers must reasonably accommodate employees' sincerely held religious practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer. A reasonable religious accommodation is any adjustment to the work environment that will allow the employee to practice his religion. An employer might accommodate an employee's religious beliefs or practices by allowing flexible scheduling, voluntary substitutions or swaps, job reassignments and lateral transfers, modification of grooming requirements and other workplace practices, policies and/or procedures.

An employer is not required to accommodate an employee's religious beliefs and practices if doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer's legitimate business interests. An employer can show undue hardship if accommodating an employee's religious practices requires more than ordinary administrative costs, diminishes efficiency in other jobs, infringes on other employees' job rights or benefits, impairs workplace safety, causes co-workers to carry the accommodated employee's share of potentially hazardous or burdensome work, or if the proposed accommodation conflicts with another law or regulation.

Employers must permit employees to engage in religious expression, unless the religious expression would impose an undue hardship on the employer. Generally, an employer may not place more restrictions on religious expression than on other forms of expression that have a comparable effect on workplace efficiency.

Employers must take steps to prevent religious harassment of their employees. An employer can reduce the chance that employees will engage in unlawful religious harassment by implementing an anti-harassment policy and having an effective procedure for reporting, investigating and correcting harassing conduct.

It is also unlawful to retaliate against an individual for opposing employment practices that discriminate based on religion or for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or litigation under Title VII.

Source: Adapted from <http://www.eeoc.gov/types/religion.html>

The Issue	What Reasonable Accommodation Means: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act
<p>A shipping company refused to hire a Jewish man as a driver because of his beard, which he wears for religious purposes. The company required him to either shave his beard or apply for an "inside," lower paying position with no public contact.</p>	<p>Employers must make reasonable accommodations to employees' and applicants' sincerely held religious beliefs as long as this does not pose an undue hardship. If the company cannot show why a beard is a hardship, it must hire the man as a driver. Notably, the company may not argue that its customers would prefer non-bearded drivers as "customer preference" is not a valid basis for a hardship.</p>
<p>A restaurant chain fired a server with a tattoo on his wrist. The tattoos are part of his sincerely held belief that his faith, the Kemetian religion, requires them. He explained his religion to management, but was fired. Management stated that the company has Christian values and that the company seeks out "clean-cut kids" as servers. Management held that its dress code, including prohibitions on tattoos, would detract from its wholesome image, an undue hardship.</p>	<p>Employers are required to support claims of undue hardship with more than hypothetical hardships based on unproven assumptions about image. Moreover, customer preference is not a legitimate reason for not accommodating a religious need.</p>
<p>An employer requires employees to read passages out loud from her preferred religious text at meetings, offers paid days off to attend religious gatherings, and helps to advance the careers of employees who adopt her faith.</p>	<p>An employee who refuses to participate in such activity must not be penalized. An employer is not permitted to treat acceptance of religion or participation in religious rituals as a condition of employment, including advancing the careers of adherents or providing benefits not open to non-adherents, such as paid days off.</p>
<p>A co-worker occasionally teases a Muslim employee about her <i>hijab</i> (headscarf). The employee is offended and tells her colleague to stop and does not report it because the company has no reporting process. A manager begins to criticize her for wearing the <i>hijab</i>, and moves her into a lower-paying back office position. In a fit of anger, he grabs at the <i>hijab</i> and tears it and knocks the employee down to the floor.</p>	<p>The company is probably not liable for a hostile work environment on the basis of the co-worker's actions. The harassment was neither severe nor pervasive and did not affect her terms and conditions of employment. The manager's actions probably give rise to a hostile work environment. The constant criticism plus the physical assault are both likely to meet the "severe or pervasive" test. Moreover, there was a clear adverse employment action (the move to the back office). The employer will not be able to avoid liability because there was an adverse employment action and there was no reporting mechanism.</p>

EXHIBIT 4-1 Reasonable Accommodation of Religion in the Workplace, Examples

A co-worker refuses to sign a workplace pledge concerning tolerance of differences because she believes homosexuals to be immoral and against God's word. Her manager orders her to sign it and she refuses. She is fired.

An employee has a religious belief that requires her to wear an anti-abortion button that shows a color photo of a fetus. The button causes disruptions and complaints. In response, the employer offers the employee three accommodations: (1) wear the button only in her cubicle; (2) cover the button at work; or (3) wear a different button with the same message but without the photograph. When she refused these accommodations, she was terminated.

Source: Adapted from www.adl.org/religious_freedom/resource_kit/religion_workplace.asp

The employer has an obligation to determine whether her refusal to sign the pledge could be accommodated. By immediately firing her, the employer failed to determine if there was an accommodation available.

Title VII does not require an employer to allow an employee to impose her religious views on others. The employer is only required to reasonably accommodate an employee's religious views. In light of the workplace disruption and complaints, and given that the proposed accommodations allowed her religious expression, she was offered a reasonable accommodation and her refusal to accept them justified her termination.

EXHIBIT 4-1 Continued

Just as in sexual harassment, religious harassment is of two types, *quid pro quo* and hostile environment. *Quid pro quo* harassment occurs when the harasser seeks to influence the behavior and makes demands of a religious nature on the victim. Examples would include pressure to attend religious services, to participate in a prayer group or to convert. When the victim does not comply, the harasser retaliates. The second type of harassment, hostile environment, occurs when there is severe or pervasive conduct in the workplace directed towards an employee because of that employee's religion. The employer has a responsibility to take actions to stop this conduct. In hostile environment, the workplace must be "permeated with discriminatory intimidation, ridicule, and insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the victim's employment and create an abusive working environment" (*Harris v. Forklift Sys., Inc.*, 510 U.S. 17, 21, 1993). Title VII also protects the employee from the employer's retaliation for making a complaint or testifying against discrimination. It is in this area, retaliation, that EEOC has seen the fastest growth in complaints.

ADDRESSING RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Just as religion provides personal strength, organizations realize that it can also contribute in positive ways to the workplace. Major organizations are finding ways to bring religion into the workplace and manage it. In order to tap into its strength, the diversity that accompanies the practice of religion in the workplace in the U.S. needs to be managed because unmanaged, it can move to discrimination. We now look at best practices and a religious diversity checklist. The best practices are modified from material developed by EEOC, and they address practices for employers. The focus areas are the challenging changes religion can bring to the workplace: religion itself, harassment, accommodation, undue hardship, schedule changes, job changes, workplace practices, the practice of prayer, and retaliation.

Religion in the Workplace Best Practices

- Use written, objective criteria for evaluating candidates for hire or promotion and apply consistently to all candidates.
- In job interviews, ask the same questions of all applicants for a particular job.
- Record the accurate business reasons for disciplinary or performance-related actions, and share these reasons with the affected employees.
- Provide training to inexperienced managers and encourage them to consult with more experienced managers or human resources personnel when addressing difficult issues.
- If confronted with customer biases, consider engaging with and educating the customers regarding any misperceptions they may have and the EEOC laws.

Religious Harassment

- Anti-harassment policy that is well-publicized and consistently applied covers religious harassment; clearly explains what is prohibited; describes procedures for bringing harassment to management's attention; and assures that complainants will be protected against retaliation.
- Allow religious expression to the same extent that other types of personal expression are allowed.
- Once an employee objects to religious conduct that is directed at him or her, take steps to end the conduct. Even conduct that you regard as harmless can become sufficiently severe or pervasive to affect the conditions of employment if allowed to persist, given the objection.
- If harassment is by a non-employee assigned by a contractor, demand that it cease, that disciplinary action be taken if it continues, and/or that a new person be assigned.
- To prevent conflicts from escalating to the level of Title VII violation, immediately intervene when you become aware of objectively abusive or insulting conduct, even absent a complaint.
- Intervene proactively and discuss with subordinates whether particular religious expression is welcome if you think the expression might be construed as harassing to a reasonable person.
- Supervisors can engage in certain religious expression, yet should avoid expression that might reasonably be perceived by subordinates as coercive, even when not so intended.

Reasonable Accommodation

- Inform employees that you will make reasonable efforts to accommodate religious practices.
- Train managers and supervisors on how to recognize religious accommodation requests.
- Develop a process for religious accommodation requests.
- Assess each request individually and avoid assumptions or stereotypes about what constitutes a religious belief or practice or what type of accommodation is appropriate.
- Confer fully and promptly to the extent needed to share any necessary information about the religious needs and the available accommodation options.
- Consider the employee's proposed method of accommodation and, if that plan is denied, explain the reasoning to the employee.
- Train managers to consider alternative available accommodations if the particular accommodation requested would pose undue hardship.
- If the accommodation cannot be implemented promptly, consider offering alternative methods of accommodation temporarily.

Undue Hardship

- The undue hardship standard refers to the legal requirement. Be flexible in evaluating whether an accommodation is feasible.
- Don't assume that an accommodation will conflict with a seniority system. Check for exceptions for religious accommodation to allow accommodation consistent with seniority.

EXHIBIT 4-2 Best Practices for Religious Diversity in the Workplace

- Don't reject a request for religious accommodation automatically because the accommodation will interfere with the existing seniority system or terms of a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). Voluntary modification to a CBA may accommodate employee religious needs.
- Train managers to be aware that, if the requested accommodation would violate the CBA or seniority system, they should confer with employee to determine alternatives.
- Ensure that managers know reasonable accommodation may require making exceptions to policies or procedures that are not part of a CBA or seniority system, where it would not infringe on other employees' legitimate expectations.

Schedule Changes, Voluntary Substitutes, and Swaps

- Work with employees to adjust a work schedule to accommodate religious practices.
- Consider adopting flexible leave and scheduling policies that will allow employees to meet their religious and other personal needs.
- Encourage voluntary substitutions and swaps with employees of similar qualifications by publicizing policy, promoting atmosphere in which substitutes are favorably regarded, and providing a central file, bulletin board, group e-mail to facilitate this process.

Change of Job Assignments and Lateral Transfers

- Consider a lateral transfer when no accommodation that would keep the employee in the position is possible without undue hardship.
- If no lateral transfer is available that would permit the employee to remain in a current or equivalent position, offer an available lower position as an accommodation and permit the employee to decide.

Modifying Workplace Practices, Policies, and Procedures

- Make efforts to accommodate an employee's desire to wear a yarmulke, hijab, or other religious garb.
- Train managers to avoid stereotyping based on religious dress and grooming practices and to not assume that atypical dress creates undue hardship.
- Encourage flexibility and creativity with work schedules, duties, selection procedures as practicable.
- Avoid pressuring or coercing employees to attend social gatherings after the employees have indicated a religious objection to attending.

Permitting Prayer, Proselytizing, and Other Forms of Religious Expression

- Train managers to gauge the actual disruption posed by religious expression in the workplace, rather than to speculate that disruption may result.
- Discuss religious expression and the need for all employees to be sensitive to beliefs of others.

Retaliation

- Reduce the risk of retaliation claims by training managers and supervisors to be aware of their anti-retaliation obligations under Title VII, including specific actions that may constitute retaliation.
- Reduce the risk of retaliation claims by carefully and timely recording the accurate business reasons for disciplinary or performance related actions and sharing these reasons with the employee.

Source: Adapted from http://eeoc.gov/policy/docs/best_practices_religion.html

EXHIBIT 4-2 Continued

Policies

Does your diversity policy include religious diversity and is there a method to communicate this policy to employees? What do you know about the religions of your employees?

Holidays/Time Off

Is there a clearly articulated policy regarding religious holiday leave (paid or unpaid) and is this policy clearly explained to employees? Is there a way for employees and managers to address scheduling conflicts resulting from religion and to find co-workers who can cover shifts? Do you take into account employees' religious holidays when planning meetings, workshops, trips, dinners, and special events?

Dress

Does your company have a dress code that is communicated to all employees? If an employee's religious practice conflicts with the code, do you have policies in place regarding attire?

Food

Does your company provide food for employees that accommodates their religious needs (kosher, halal, vegetarian)?

Employee Networks

Does your company allow the formation of on-site religion-based, employee networks and does your company clearly communicate the policies for these groups and their relationship to the company as a whole?

Office Space

Does your company have a policy regarding personal workspace that includes religious decoration and is this policy clearly explained to employees? Does your company allow holiday decoration of office space and do these accommodate the needs of religiously and culturally diverse employees?

Religious Practice

Does your company allow religious practice in the workplace (prayer, meditation) and how do you communicate the policies regarding religious practice to the employees and how do employees communicate their religious practice needs to management?

Source: Excerpted from www.tanenbaum.org/resources/workplace-tools/religious-diversity-checklist

EXHIBIT 4-3 Religious Diversity Checklist

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY CHECKLIST

This checklist is a good way for you to determine where an organization stands now in terms of addressing issues related to religious diversity. It is adapted from a model presented by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.

Summary

This article focused on the role that religion plays in the U.S. workplace today. Given the diversity of religious practices, there is a growing trend in the U.S. toward an integration of faith and work life, a trend that brings both benefits and challenges to the workplace.

As a part of an organization's culture, religious beliefs can give meaning to shared goals and environments, and lead people to support the company's mission and one another. The diversity of religious practices today presents an increased potential for conflict between religious values and business expectations. Balancing the needs of an organization with the rights of employees requires a clear understanding of the legal protections provided for religion by the U.S. Constitution and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. With careful management, an organization can tap into the strengths and benefits of a diverse religious environment to add value to the organization members' quality of life and output.

Discussion Questions

1. Comment on the general involvement of religion in U.S. public life, and particularly in the workplace. If a Puritan religious leader were suddenly to show up at your most recent job site, how might you explain the issues related to religion there to him?
2. You are an entrepreneur beginning your first start-up company, and you have ample seed money. How might you intentionally involve religion in the new business culture you are about to build?
3. Using the Religious Diversity Checklist in Exhibit 4-3, conduct an audit of an organization to which you have belonged. Once you answer the questions, analyze the answers and generalize from them to offer the organization advice on its treatment of religion in the workplace. How would you rate the organization on its performance on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being excellent)?
4. Discuss the contributions religion might make to an organization for which you have worked. Then, discuss the challenges that the introduction of religious diversity there might create.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

You manage a department of twenty-three employees, many of whom are Christian. Write a policy that clearly articulates how the organization accommodates requests for religious holiday leave. Include an explanation of how employees and management will communicate and resolve scheduling conflicts that may arise as a result of multiple requests for leave. Explain how you will communicate this policy to your employees.

Even the
migration
workplace.

UNDERSTANDING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS IN TODAY'S GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

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Research indicates that communication between culturally diverse sub-group members is increasingly dissimilar (Searight & Gafford, 2005). As the workforce becomes more diverse, immigration increases and technology rapidly advances with e-commerce, Skype, video conferencing, global call centers, and webcasting, nearly everyone participates in intercultural communication even if they never leave the United States. However, we tend to be less aware of the differences in styles when communicating with coworkers, supervisor, suppliers, and customers whose communication styles may differ considerably from our own than when we are in another country.

THE COMMUNICATION MODEL

While all communication follows a basic model, cultural differences can complicate the process and contribute to misunderstandings in the workplace. All communication, verbal and non-verbal, involves a sender who encodes a message that he transmits over some channel to a receiver who decodes the message and provides feedback. This transmission happens within a context of "noise," i.e., all of the factors that can reduce the clarity of understanding the message. Certainly, when individuals exhibit communication styles that are based on different norms and values, i.e., create noise, the possibility of miscommunication increases significantly (See figure 4-1).

GROWTH AND FLEXIBILITY

Effective communication in the workplace can be both confusing and challenging. It requires not only significant knowledge of many different cultural frameworks, but also the willingness to attain personal growth and flexibility throughout the process. First, one needs to accept that the verbal and non-verbal communication style that we are most familiar with often become

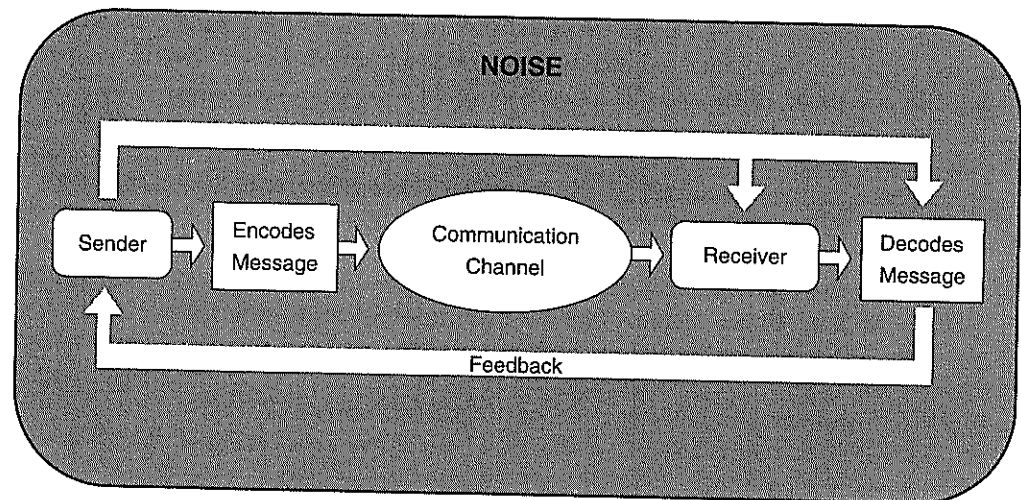


FIGURE 4-1 The Basic Communication Process

our unconscious norm against which we judge the communication styles of others. For example, if you were socialized to believe that making eye contact indicates that a person is telling the truth, you may have an unconscious tendency to judge people who consider *not* making eye contact as a sign of respect as being untrustworthy.

Second, in communication exchanges, there is a tendency to "categorize" individuals as being representative of their entire culture. So, when you start to communicate with a person, his appearance, clothing, accent or name may lead you to inaccurate interpretations, conclusions, and judgments about his message. However, such generalizations do not leave one open to the influence of each individual's life experiences and socialization. While commonalities may exist amongst members of groups, each individual member of that group has characteristics that makes him unique. The problem is that stereotypes about groups of people are overgeneralizations and are either inaccurate or do not apply to the individual group member in question. So, in dealing with a customer from a Hispanic culture, or with an Hispanic name, it is easy to assume that he will typify all Hispanics when in fact his life experiences, could include many non-Hispanic influences, like study abroad, travel and more.

While generalizations may be accurate about groups, they're *never* going to be wholly true of individuals... This doesn't mean that we have gotten the facts wrong, but only that in any culture you will always find a broad range of behaviors vis-à-vis particular characteristics (Storti, 1994, pp. 7-8).

Third, people have many social identities and some are more **salient** or important influences on their patterns of communication than others. An African American woman may develop a communication style more influenced by her status as a woman, i.e., gender, or her generational cohort, i.e., as a baby boomer, than her race.

Flexible communicators avoid using a **culture specific** approach that assumes that all members of a subgroup communicate in the same way. For example, if a person is working with a client from a group that tends to be sensitive to time, speaks directly and is not very emotional, it does not mean that this particular person will respond well to communications that stress these elements. For many reasons, these parameters may not be strong in her personal communication framework. A better approach is to be **mindful**, i.e., more observant and tuned

into her communication style, and to listen for cues to determine if she seems to value this particular communication approach or not. Jandt (2004) proposes that by nature, people of all cultural backgrounds are inherently the same. It is their exposure over time to their society and its values (i.e., socialization) that shapes their communication style and each individual has unique life experiences.

Being able to communicate effectively with people of diverse cultural backgrounds is a skill that can provide a competitive advantage in the marketplace and capitalizes on one of the positive aspects of having diversity in an organization. Employees who understand and appreciate differences, such as greetings, meeting formalities, scheduling, negotiations, and presentation skills will have a better chance of doing business effectively than those who continue to overlook the importance of developing more mindful and flexible intercultural communication skills or who assume that all members of a particular culture communicate with the same style. The key is to develop an awareness that improves understanding between cultures.

LANGUAGES

Of 155 million workers in the United States, 79 percent speak fluent English, with 9.1% reporting as being limited in English proficiency, this means that they reported speaking English less than "very well." In a Gallup survey, 96% of Americans believed it was either crucial or very important for members of the U.S. workforce to speak English. Approximately a quarter of the U.S. workforce can hold a conversation in a language other than their primary language, 55% of which is in Spanish (Fry, 2005). In the Hispanic community, 47% of Spanish youth are bilingual in Spanish and English. However, younger Hispanics often speak English as their primary language. With the median age of Hispanics in the United States at 27.4 years of age, compared to the median age of Euro-Americans at 36.4 years of age, the opportunity for this cultural group to utilize their English and bilingual communication skills to advance in business organizations is unprecedented.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT COMMUNICATION, STYLES AND AMERICAN SUB-CULTURES

In communicating, each person participating in the conversation must understand their own experiences, culture, stereotypes, and assumptions, as well as put forth an effort to understand the experiences, culture, stereotypes, and realized and unrealized assumptions of the other participants. Because stereotypes are primarily generalizations and are not necessarily an accurate way to describe the communication styles of every member of an entire culture, to think that everybody will communicate the same way is of course a generalization and referred to as a culture specific approach. However, this often happens as an unconscious process. So, rather than assuming that all Asians will value and need time to establish a relationship before reaching a business agreement, it is preferable to observe the communication cues and behaviors of an Asian American client to determine if this seems to be important for him. For example, if he appear a bit uncomfortable when you get right into the purpose of the meeting, rather than exchange pleasantries first? In Asian cultures, indirectness is often considered polite. A common stereotype is that Asians are sneaky or hard to figure out, undoubtedly a result of an indirect communication style. This has led many to distrust Asians in the workplace. Some may even feel that Asians are deceptive or hiding pertinent information while in fact they have been socialized to communicate in a less directive style to demonstrate respect.

Another example of how stereotypes affect communication is that Black Americans can be perceived as more violent and aggressive than whites. Because Black Americans as a group tend to have a more direct communication style than many Whites or Asians, Black Americans consider it admirable to express feelings, and emotions and value members of society who do so. Early communications research by Foeman and Pressley (1987) identified five Black-American cultural values that, if leveraged appropriately, can be beneficial in an organizational environment and in communication: assertiveness, directness, morality, receptiveness, and cohesion.

Since Native Americans tend to be soft spoken or quiet, their communication style can create an expectation that they will not participate in conversations, or in contrast, the assumption that they are overly aggressive when they do speak up (Hernandez, 2007). In Native American cultures, oral tradition is important and this may result in less talk and more listening than most Euro-Americans expect. Because it is considered shameful in Native American culture to make mistakes in public, this may be another reason why some Native Americans don't tend to participate as verbally in the workplace as others.

Different styles of speech and language can cause anxiety in interpreting directions and verbal and non-verbal cues, especially when there are differences in the way words are articulated. It is assumed that people will contribute to an interaction in a greater capacity when they are comfortable and have similarities with their counterparts, including common economic, social, and cultural backgrounds (McComb, 2001).

While sociologists view different dialects as all being correct ways of speaking, others perceive some dialects, such as British English, as being more prestigious (Langmia & Durham, 2007). In contrast, in Black American culture, language is individualistic and complicated, as described by Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey and uses vivid descriptive words, images and metaphors (Taylor, 1990). Because language is a combination of their English vocabulary and complex Black structure that sometimes results in differences in the way that Black Americans use verb tenses. Black Americans sometimes talk in a more rhythmic speech than white Americans, so conversations and presentations may appear more boastful and animated. Given the percentage of Black Americans who live in poverty and their historically lower levels of academic achievement as a group, this speech style is sometimes unconsciously less respected than other styles.

Asian-influenced communication styles tend to differ from those of Euro-Americans in that Asians can be more indirect in providing information and data prior to making their main point. Some may view this as a way to provide a complete rationale for the ultimate decision or strategy. However, this can leave other people searching for the substance at the beginning of a communication, lead to difficulty in identifying the main points and result in poor listening and a loss of interest. In contrast, many Euro-Americans tend to lead with the main point or decision (i.e., use a more direct style), and then follow-up with supporting data and rationale. Asians listening to a presentation or reading this in an email could view this style as too aggressive or too forward.

For example, presentations of case studies by students of Middle Eastern descent focus on emotional aspects of the case and then jump to the solution, without first developing the rationale for it. This can be troublesome for students from low-context cultures who value a step-by-step analysis leading to the proposed resolution in a direct and concise manner. While neither communication style is incorrect, students with an understanding of these different communication styles can develop a competitive edge in the global business environment.

Differences in communication styles often are unrecognized or denied because people are unsure of how to cope with these differences. Asians, for example, have a tendency to shield others from knowing negative information and expect others to do the same (Searight, 2005).

In contrast, African Americans can come across as blunt or too-straightforward because of their tendency to use a more direct style of communication (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1996).

MAINTAINING HARMONY AND EMOTIONALISM

People from different cultures may deal with conflict quite differently. African Americans sometimes distrust the established ways of doing things, and challenge the norms and expectations within an organization. Asians, however, are more apt to conform to established processes, roles and hierarchies within an organization, while repressing public feelings and emotions (Searight, 2005).

In terms of negotiation, Asians are often more willing to apologize as a way to continue moving forward especially when things become awkward. They are typically expected to apologize whenever there is tension or awkwardness, but Euro-Americans and Black Americans often are less willing to take any blame and only offer an apology as warranted, if at all. Americans are also more likely to provide an explanation with an apology, while Asians tend to internalize the blame, acting in a more submissive manner, without necessarily providing any rationale (Carr-Ruffino, 2006).

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP COMMUNICATION: CULTURE CONTEXT

America as a whole is considered to be **low context**, highly individualistic culture where directness is valued and people are responsible for their own success. However, some of the U.S. population growth both through immigration and birthrate is more from the **high context** collectivist subcultures such as Asians, Africans, Native Americans and Middle-Easterners where the group is more important than the individual and indirect communication is more common (Lingley, 2006). Since these cultures are less direct, listening is more important and silence indicates understanding. Many Euro-Americans prefer a more direct communication style and rush to fill silences (McDowell, 2003).

In some cultures, there is a strong emphasis on group cohesiveness and belonging, i.e., **collectivism**. The group, which can be as narrow as immediate family, or as broad as colleagues and acquaintances, is of utmost importance to members of these cultures, and they value conformity and commitment to the group (i.e., relationships), as well as compliance to maintain harmony, above even honesty, within the group.

This is in sharp contrast to the United States, where **individualism** and independence are critical to one's self value. In American culture, maintaining self-respect and one's image is extremely important and people will act more aggressively to preserve their self image in negotiations and conflict. In other cultures, such as Asian cultures, it is the group that matters more than any one individual. So, people may avoid conflict to not upset the collective group's image (McDowell, 2003).

In American Indian and Asian cultures, the individual is expected to remain modest and humble. Advancing or promotion of oneself and one's accomplishments or taking oneself too seriously violates these values (LeBaron, 2003). For example, a very talented American Indian student may hide academic competence to avoid seeming superior, which is considered inappropriate arrogance in that culture. This could inhibit their performance in class participation, team settings and job interviews. To ensure harmony, American Indians may be less aggressively competitive and work better cooperatively (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

Frequently, people from these collective societies belong to a small number of very intimate groups to which they are extremely loyal over the entire course of their lives and

this tendency has implications for teamwork and management. Collective societies reward systems [that] benefit the group as a whole rather than any one individual and hard work is rewarded intrinsically. In contrast, in **low context cultures** like the U.S., people are more assertive, talkative, and direct in communication and often devalue the attentive listening and silences so common in high context communication.

When low context communicators actively question a speaker, it can make people in high context cultures uneasy because it can produce tension or disrupt harmony (Berry, 2009). In contrast, in the United States an individual's personal needs are often placed above the needs of the group with minimal commitment or loyalty to the group.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Many people utilize nonverbal cues to better understand communication when they are not certain they know what the other person is trying to communicate. Most cultures use different non-verbal cues, based on their own assumptions and values, making the combination of interpreting verbal and non-verbal cues particularly complex. For example, in the United States, eye contact, pleasantness of vocal expressions, affirmative head nods, head, and closer physical distance between communicators are considered affiliative. In other cultures, these same behaviors may instead increase uncertainty and anxiety (Neuliep, 2003). For example, in Black American cultures, listeners may avert their eyes to indicate respect and attention, while speakers from other cultures are expected to look at listeners directly in the eye. If one member of the interaction is unaware of this culturally accepted communication style, it can unknowingly create tension.

In low context North America, there tends to be far less emphasis placed on nonverbal communication than in high context countries. Non-verbal communication can also be challenging in terms of electronic communications because with little to no opportunity to view mannerisms or hear tones, the communication can likely be judged as too direct and can seem harsh and impolite (Sanders & Wiseman, 1993).

BENEFITS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Frequently, even leaders who understand the need for intercultural communication and the complexities of diverse organizations become tentative about the extent that they should assert themselves to encourage intercultural communication within an organization, questioning exactly how much change should be expected and what metrics will best measure success. It can be disruptive to promote intercultural understanding and communication without first observing and analyzing the organizational norms and values.

While all cultures have some strong common beliefs and assumptions, others seem to include sharper contrasts within a wide range of values, beliefs, and assumptions. Often, one communication pattern will typically dominate another and therefore be more influential, but not necessarily apply to every member of the culture. For example, Americans can be considered aggressive and assertive in high context cultures, however, many Americans are passive and compliant.

Competency and sensitivity to differences in intercultural communication creates a more productive workplace with an increased number of contributing perspectives and a better opportunity for creativity. Businesses, both domestically and internationally, have begun to focus on the idea that capitalizing on intercultural communication knowledge and development can provide diverse perspectives and competitive advantages. In essence, the

overall goal of successful communications in conflict, better understanding, more personal anxiety and fear of differences (Neuliep, 2000).

Discussion Questions

1. What factors make it difficult for people to use different communication styles can cause serious misunderstandings?
2. Why is it important to understand some of the differences between diverse groups?
3. Briefly describe an example of an intercultural misunderstanding anticipated in or observed in the workplace, and explain how it exhibits some of the dimensions described in the text. How can you act differently to improve the communication in that situation?
4. Develop an original example of an intercultural misunderstanding situation that could cause incorrect assumptions for a position.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Go to <http://www.gmi.org> and search for "The Ten Commandments of Diversity." This page presents ten sayings that represent commonly accepted "American" values. Think about how these "American" values might be perceived by Hispanic Americans, or Asian Americans as they read this paper that analyzes how these could lead to lack of understanding in the workplace.

DIVERSITY ON THE WEB

Go to <http://www.diversityinc.com> and search for "Diversity in the Workplace: Coworkers" (Article # 3621).

After reading this list and the blog that focuses on communicating with Native Americans and about workplace diversity.

You will have to register to use this website. It is free of charge and this is a very helpful workplace diversity resource.